

Women, Enlightenment and Catholicism

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5 María Gertrudis Hore (1742-1801)

The neoclassic poetry and Enlightenment thought of a cloistered Spanish nun

Elizabeth Franklin Lewis

María Gertrudis Hore, known also by her pen name the *Hija del Sol*, referring to her poetic talents as the "daughter" of the sun-god of poetry Apollo, was one of the most celebrated women poets of her day. Hore's poems appeared in some of the most widely read periodicals of her day, an accomplishment all the more remarkable since most of them came while she was a cloistered nun in the convent of Santa María in the southern Spanish port town of Cádiz. The topics of her poetry ranged from love and friendship to poetry itself, and some of her most personal and religious poems were never published. Until recently, it was the circumstances of her religious profession after sixteen years of marriage that fascinated readers perhaps even more than her verse. This chapter will give a biographical and historical introduction to María Gertrudis Hore and her intellectual world in Cádiz, along with a reading of a selection of her poetic writings to examine how Hore attempted to blend both her religious and poetic vocations as she explored Neoclassic poetic trends and Enlightenment thought from behind the cloister.

Life as an Enlightened socialite-turned-nun

María Gertrudis Hore y Ley was born in Cádiz on December 5, 1742 to Miguel Hore and María Ley, both Irish immigrants living in Cádiz, Spain. The Hore and the Ley families were successful merchants in southern Spain. In August of 1762 María Gertrudis married her father's business partner Esteban Fleming of nearby Puerto de Santa María. Sixteen years later, in June of 1778, Fleming wrote a letter giving his wife permission to enter the convent of Santa María in Cádiz, a cloistered order of the *Concepcionistas Calzadas* (Morand 2006b). Hore made her religious profession in February of 1779. She died on August 9, 1801 at the age of 56, apparently during an epidemic of yellow fever. At the time of her demise, she was serving as her convent's secretary (Serrano y Sanz 1903).

Scholars believe that, before entering the convent, María Gertrudis Hore must have led a rather active social and intellectual life both in Cádiz, and,

perhaps occasionally, in Madrid. In Cádiz, she participated in the literary salons (*tertulias*) hosted by intellectual Antonio de Ulloa (Morand 2009, 37). She also attended important events in Cádiz such as, in September 1768, the famous public examinations of child prodigy María Rosario Cepeda, to whom she dedicated two poems published in a collection of the same year – *Relación de los ejercicios literarios que la Sra. Doña María del Rosario Cepeda y Mayo* – commemorating the event (Morand 2009, 34). But her poetic and intellectual life did not stop after taking her religious vows. She maintained correspondence with Friar Diego Tadeo González, a member of the influential group of poets known as the *Escuela de Salamanca* (Morand 2009, 37 and 44–45). She also published a significant corpus of mostly secular poetry in important journals outside of Cádiz including the *Correo de los Ciegos de Madrid*, the *Diario de Madrid*, the *Semanario curioso y erudito de Salamanca* and the *Semanario de Cartagena* (Morand 2007, 10–11). In the Convent of Santa María, Frédérique Morand has found that she not only kept personal decorative items from her secular life, such as fine china, but she also had in the inventory of her belongings important intellectual possessions, such as Luis Moreri's 1674 *Gran diccionario histórico*, an important reference tool for Enlightenment thinkers (Morand 2009).

Critical and historical reception

Fellow writers, historians and literary critics took an interest in the life and work of Hore even during her lifetime. Contemporary women poets dedicated poems to her. Another poet who signed her work as Madame Abello reacted publicly through poetry in the *Diario de Barcelona* to one of Hore's anonymous publications in that same journal, begging her to reveal her identity (Sullivan 1992). Another published poet from Madrid, Margarita Hickey, dedicated a poem in her 1789 *Poesías varias* to a friend named "Fenisa," a pseudonym that Hore used in her own poetry to refer to herself (Morand 2007).¹ Hore's contemporary from Cádiz, historian Nicolás María de Cambiaso, included her in his 1829 *Memorias para la biografía y para la bibliografía de la isla de Cádiz*, in which he described Hore: "llamábanla comunmente la hija del sol, para significar por este renombre cuánto brillaba entre las otras damas por su dulcísima voz y hechiceros encantos y melífluos versos" ("they commonly called her the Daughter of the Sun, to signify with this renown how much she stood out among the other women for her beautiful voice and her bewitching charms and sweet verses") (Cambiaso 1830, 72).² Nineteenth-century woman writer Cecilia Böhl de Faber, known by the pen name Fernán Caballero, published a short story "La Hija del Sol" in her 1862 collection *Relaciones*. Caballero's mother, Frasquita Lárrea, was a contemporary of María Gertrudis Hore, and was also a writer and active intellectual from Cádiz. In Caballero's story, she gives an explanation for Hore's mysterious decision to leave her marriage and enter the convent at the age of thirty-five, which in the *relación* is due to a dramatic adulterous

relationship that ends tragically, or so the protagonist thinks. But the shock of seeing her lover first killed, and then later miraculously alive and well, spurs saintly repentance in the *Hija del Sol*, who immediately confesses and takes her religious vows:

La hija del sol, después de restablecida de una larga enfermedad, escribe a su marido, se confiesa culpable, le ruega que la perdone y le dé licencia para entrar en un convento a hacer penitencia. El marido le da esta licencia, la bula es otorgada, y La hija del sol entró y profesó en las Descalzas de Cádiz, en el que, después de una vida ejemplar, murió como una santa.

(Caballero 1862, 197)

(The Hija del Sol, after recovering from a long illness, writes to her husband, confesses her sin, begs for his forgiveness, and to give her permission to enter a convent to make her penitence. The husband gives her this permission, the order is approved, and the Hija del Sol entered and professed in the Discalced of Cadiz, where, after an exemplary life, she died as a saint.)

Caballero's *relación* influenced many critics who followed, from Leopoldo Augusto de Cueto, who edited a collection of Hore's unpublished poetry in his 1875 *Poetas líricos del siglo XVIII*, to Russell Sebold in his 1984 article on Hore. Morand agrees that, given the unusual nature of her religious profession while still married, it is logical that adultery was the reason for Hore becoming a nun (Morand 2009). Yet the fact that her poetic and intellectual life did not end with her religious profession, and to the contrary seemed to increase, the majority of her published work appearing after 1779, points to more than a romantic as sinner-turned-saint in either Hore's religious or poetic professions.

While Fernán Caballero portrayed Hore as a reformed Romantic in her life (Lewis 1993), more recently critics have focused on various aspects of Hore's poetry to find insight not only into the elusive biographical details of her life, but also to identify in her verse the poet's participation and even contribution to the major poetic, aesthetic and philosophic trends of her times. Some have found in her poems indications of a transition from Enlightenment sensibility to Romantic ideals and aesthetics (Sebold 1984, Guardiola 2000, Ullman 2000). Others have focused on her lesser studied religious poetry, much of it not published during her lifetime (Nang 2000, Morand 2006, Johnson 2015). Some also emphasize the neoclassic and rococo qualities of many of her poems, especially in her appropriation of popular contemporary poetic forms and styles (Ullman 2000, Lewis 2004). Such is the case with her use of the popular Anacreontic form, which as we shall see, demonstrates her unique position in her two "professions" as both an Enlightened woman poet, and as a cloistered nun.

The Anacreontic form in eighteenth-century Europe and Spain

Marshall Brown traces the popularity of the Anacreontic form to the sixteenth-century humanist Henri Estienne's discovery of what he thought to be a collection of poems by the Greek poet Anacreon. They were simple lyrics of wine, women and song that were actually composed by anonymous post-classical writers, but they were to impact three centuries of European poetry, with a special attraction for the poets of the eighteenth century. In Brown's words

These are poems in which quantity replaces quality. Physiological rather than psychological, reducing all things human to a common measure—and I mean verse measure as much as material one—Anacreontics take the heart out of love. What is left is only pain—sensation rather than emotion.

(Brown 1999, 375)

Brown traces the evolution of Anacreontic poetry throughout Europe, identifying in it the "roots of Romantic lyric." Brown points to a series of paradoxes in a poem by Spanish author José Cadalso not "merely of cleverness or superficiality, but genuine tensions between sexes, generations, classes, and talents that the poets can only master by allowing them to be named in a fashion that cavalierly seems to ignore their reality" (Brown 1999, 388). Of the most famous Spanish composer of the Anacreontic form, Juan Meléndez Valdés, Brown states "The Anacreontic mode becomes a background to measure the obviously tumultuous world of everyday" (Brown 1999, 390). Irene Gómez Castellano studies these tensions further, finding, in the seemingly light hearted style of the rococo Anacreontic poems that the men of the Escuela Salmantina exchanged among themselves, an "escape valve" from their otherwise serious commitment to Enlightenment reforms: "cauce de alejamiento de la realidad creando un ensueño, un refugio tranquilo" ("channel of distancing from reality creating a fantasy, a tranquil refuge") (Gómez Castellano 2012, 51). Characterized as "breve, repetitiva, musical y circular" (brief, repetitive, musical and circular) this verse form transmits "un aura de sencillez, dulzura y facilidad aparente" ("an aura of simplicity, sweetness, and apparent facileness") (Gómez Castellano 2012, 51), but it also represented for the men who composed it a subversive evasion of absolutist social control (Gómez Castellano 2012, 99). Women like María Gertrudis Hore also needed an escape from the "tensions and tumults" of the everyday, and from the controls placed on them by an absolutist, male-dominated, society. Through her Anacreontic poetry, Hore, like her male counterparts, shared friendship in the form of advice, comfort and fun, but also sometimes frustration and personal malaise, searching through her poetry for an escape from a hostile world.

Hore's Anacreontic poetry

Eleven of Hore's poems follow the Anacreontic style of the day, although not always strictly adhering to that form's typical light-hearted subject matter. Their wide range of subjects – from friendship to personal introspection and grief – on first reading appear to be united only by their rhyme and meter, usually with short verses of 6–7 syllables and assonant rhyme. The aforementioned prominent eighteenth-century female poet Madame Abello gently criticized Hore's unorthodox adaptation of the popular eighteenth century form in her poem "Muere, muere en mis manos," which uses the style to lament the death of a little bird: "Perdona que el estilo/Del verso haya innovado/por ser del asunto/Más propio el Elegíaco" ("Forgive me for having changed the style of the verse, since the topic was more appropriate to Elegy") (Abello 1799, Sullivan 1992). This poem has the characteristic rococo use of diminutives – *pajarito*, *cuerpecito* ("little bird," "little body") that Ullman has found in another of Hore's Anacreontic poems, "El nido," published posthumously by Cueto. Both poems, although seemingly light-hearted and artificial in nature, express a sense of disillusionment that Ullman sees as pre-romantic (Ullman 2000). Cueto's collection of *Anacreonticas* begins with the aforementioned "El Nido," which depicts the discovery by two lovers of a happy domestic scene of a nest filled with baby birds – a typical rococo idyllic scene worthy of a painting by Fragonard. But this happy poem is followed by the lamenting "Déjame que siente" which continues with the use of Anacreontic form and the rococo style in its use of diminutives, but anguishes at discovering the baby birds "muertecitos," ("little dead birds") torn from their happy nest by a cruel little boy. Cueto follows this poem by a shorter one in the same meter and rhyme, this time dedicated to a young son's death from smallpox. While the meter and rhyme may be the same, gone are the diminutives and artifice of the previous poems. Instead of the distanced anguish of the mother bird who sings her lament at the cruel destruction of her nest and family in the previous poem, the tragedy of the death of a child becomes the poet's own experience as she weaves a wreath of flowers with "trémulas manos" (trembling hands) and places them on the dead child's forehead "último don funesto/del maternal cariño" (maternal love's last tragic gift). While these three poems were collected and edited by Cueto posthumously, they show not only Hore's participation in the poetic trends of her day but also the way she injected a woman's perspective and replaced rococo artifice with the deeply personal.

Many of Hore's Anacreontic poems feature friendship among women. Between May and November of 1795, sixteen years after becoming a nun, Hore published a series of six poems in the *Diario de Madrid*, five of them dedicated to female friendship, four of which were in the Anacreontic style. The first of these four celebrates female friendship in true Anacreontic style, describing in very sensual terms a beautiful and sumptuous salad enjoyed

by a group of female friends. However, in contrast to the typical pastoral outdoor setting of male-authored Anacreontic poetry, Hore's feast occurs indoors, a quiet and peaceful sanctuary removed from the frenetic world of conflict outside their doors "De riñas y cuestiones ardiendo está la Aldea, todas hablan a un tiempo, y no hay quien las comprenda" (The village is burning with disputes and quarrels, all the women talk at the same time, and no one can understand them). Women outside this protected space fight each other "Unas zagalas gritan por sus propias querellas, y otras enardecidas disputan las ajenas" (Some shepherdesses shout over their own complaints, and others who are inflamed dispute the complaints of others). These friends lock themselves away from the outside chaos: "Niña, de la cabaña cierra pronto la puerta, y por que no la empujen, arrímalas una piedra" (Girl, shut the door of the cabin quickly, and so that they don't push it open, block it with a stone.) Inside the women work together to create a sumptuous salad "aliñada y compuestas, con la blanca cebolla y la borraja fresca" (aligned and composed, with the white onion and fresh borage). The imagery of the salad is rich – the "rubí del tomate" (ruby tomate), the "esmeralda bella del pimentillo" (beautiful emerald of the sweet pepper), a juicy watermelon: "Parte ese verde globo, su corazón nos muestra muy rojo y matizado con las pepitas negras" (cut open this globe, so it shows us its heart all red and speckled with its black seeds). These women not only find peace and quiet in their all-female feast, but also friendship and pleasure "Y mientras las otras necedades alternan, comamos y bebamos en paz nuestra merienda" (and while the other women exchange foolishness, let us eat and drink our snack in peace). The three *Anacreonticas* to follow this poem also are addressed to female friends, offering sisterly advice. In "Bellísima zagala" Hore uses classical Anacreontic allusion, perhaps shockingly so, as she offers guidance to a young novice who has left her friends in the convent: nuns are described as "sacerdotisas" (priestesses) while the Virgin Mary is referred to as the "la más casta Venus" (the most chaste Venes). The relationship with her young friend is close, and inspires the poet to compose her verse "Por ti de mi pereza sacudo el largo sueño, y la arrojada lira por ti de nuevo templo" (For you my laziness shakes of its long dream, and for you once more I play the forgotten lyre.) The poem "¿Hasta cuándo, Gerarda?" encourages a young friend Gerarda, also a poet, to apply her talent to loftier topics than love "esas luces tan claras, que te concedió el Cielo, no le causen enojos, sí tribútenle inciensos" (don't let those bright lights that Heaven has given you cause you distress, but instead offer it your incense). The poet shares her own past mistakes "Yo lloré ingratitudes, yo celebraba afectos, empleando en delirios la dulzura del metro" (I lamented ingratitude, I celebrated affection, and in my delirium employed the sweetness of meter). By dedicating her talents to more worthy subjects, Gerarda can achieve higher recognition for her verses in the "más sacro Parnaso" (most sacred Parnassus) – Hore's classical allusion that ties heavenly rewards to poetic accomplishment. While Hore's published friendship poems contrast

the separation women feel in the outside world to the supportive relationships within the convent, Hore used other Anacreontic poems to explore very different topics of personal introspection of conflicts between her professions as both poet and nun.

The fourth of the Anacreontic poems published by Cueto is a poem dedicated to the poet's cousin. It begins: "Amado primo mío,/No creas a mi amiga,/Pues de antiguos papeles/No quedan ni aún cenizas." This poem seems to reject the rococo lyric of her past, or at least it affirms that these poems are in her past, claiming that her pen (pluma) now is only permitted "místicas poesías":

A profanos asuntos
No puedo dirigirla;
Pues ya de mi memoria
Tan distantes se miran.
Ya mi numen rehusa
La invocación antigua
Del mentido Parnaso,
De sus fingidas ninfas.
(I cannot dedicate my pen
To worldly subjects;
Since now they seem
So distant from my memory.
Now my inspiration rejects
The old invocation
Of the deceiving Parnassus,
Of its false nymphs).

This poem uses typical Anacreontic imagery and allusion to reject rococo sensibility by pointing to their artificiality – these are pretend nymphs, and a deceptive Parnassus. Later she refers to the roses from Venus as "pisadas y marchitas" (trampled and wilted), and the attentions of young lovers, "Mirtilos y Ergastos," have been forgotten and replaced by a "pastor más amante" (more loving pastor). Not only has she rejected these previous inspirations for her poetry from her mind, she claims to have destroyed the verses themselves "Rompí o entregué al fuego/Cuanto serme podía/Fomento a unas memorias/Ya de mi aborrecidas" (I tore up or threw in the fire, all that I could/Encouragement to memories that now are hated by me). The claim to have destroyed much of her former verse in the poem, yet the existence of several collections of manuscripts which include poems that appear to have been composed before her religious profession, such as the aforementioned poem "El nido," have intrigued critics and historians, and certainly complicate the narrative of sinner-turned-saint painted by Cambiaso and Caballero.

Other poems not in the Anacreontic style also point not only to the poet's conflicted state of mind, but also to her intellectual inspiration in

the philosophies of her time. The hendecasyllabic poem "Meditación" from the Cueto collection looks to Edward Young's popular *Night Thoughts* to express the poet's isolation and angst, while she also seeks comfort in female friendship. The poem begins referring to the exchange of poetry among friends "Los dulcísimos metros que tu pluma/Hoy me dirige, amada amiga mía/Fueran el refrigerio más gustoso,/Si admitieran alguno mis fatigas" (The sweet verses that your pen directs to me, my beloved friend/would be a most pleasing refreshment/If my weariness would allow any). The poet speaks of her "feliz melancolía" (happy melancholy) and of "funestos objectos" (terrible objects) that conserve "las tristezas mías" (my sadness). The poet yearns to be unknowing and unfeeling:

¡Qué estado tan feliz! Quien le conoce
No apetece más gustos ni más dichas,
Pues libre del temor y la esperanza,
Piensa en la nada, y nada le lastima.
(What a happy state! The one who knows
but does not desire more pleasures or happiness,
thus free of fear and hope,
Thinks about nothing, and nothing can hurt him.)

The poem continues for forty-five verses with images of destruction and death – "recios huracanes" (vigorous hurricanes) "altísimos cipreses" (tall cypresses) "sepulcros de las almas grandes" (sepulchers of great souls) – inspired by Young, whom she calls the "filósofo del Támesis" (philosopher of the Tamesis (i.e., the Thames) and "divino Young." But the poem comes back to reality, begging forgiveness of her friend: "Mi distracción perdona, amiga mía (Pardon my distraction my friend). She ends yearning not for numbness to her pain, but for the same female company enjoyed by her friend:

¡Feliz tú, que viviendo en otro mundo,
Disfrutas de la amable compañía
De tus amigas, sin que estorbo alguno
Venga importuno a acibarar tu dicha.
(Happy are you, who, living in another world,
You enjoy the amiable company
Of your friends, and no impediment can
Come without warning to embitter your happiness.)

Was Hore writing to a friend in the convent before taking her own vows? Although these manuscripts are not dated, critics since Cueto have been comparing biographical clues in her unpublished poems such as this one to the incomplete record that we have of this intriguing poet. Historians such as Frédérique Morand have been able to seek out more information about Hore, her poetic production and her biographical circumstances in Cádiz. While differences in interpretation of this record exist, most current

scholars agree that professing her religious vocation in 1779 did not end Hore's poetic vocation, nor did it limit her to "místicas poesías," as she herself indicated. Rather, María Gertrudis Hore's poetic career took off from within the cloister. As Frédérique Morand points out, despite living in supposed isolation from the world, Hore was not only aware of various outside events, such as a tragic collapse of a bridge between the Puerto de Santa María and Cádiz, but she also wrote about them in great detail (Morand 2006b). Most of her publications (thirteen of her seventeen identified publications) appeared between 1787 and 1796 (six of them published in multiple journals throughout Spain).³

The life and poetic legacy of María Gertrudis Hore offers much insight into what it meant to be a talented woman artist during Spain's late Enlightenment period. Hore used her poetry as a means of personal and artistic exploration both before and after becoming a nun, and her religious profession did not mean the end of her poetic profession. Rather, her public poetic presence outside the cloistered walls of her convent increased through her publication as her poems appeared all over Spain, notably in the capital, Madrid, and in other intellectual centers during the Enlightenment (Barcelona and Salamanca for example). Lastly, Hore adapted in her poetry Enlightenment aesthetics, poetic forms and philosophy, while she also expressed her unique point of view as a woman who was both admired and restricted by her society.

Notes

- 1 This, together with their shared ethnic ties as Hispano-Irish women, Morand believes to be proof that the two were known to each other.
- 2 This and all other translations from Spanish to English are my own.
- 3 Morand and I count these slightly differently. Morand counts a letter, décima and sonnet written and published commemorating the King and Queen's visit to Cádiz as one publication, while I count them as two (poems).

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6 María Lorenza de los Ríos y Loyo, Marquesa de Fuerte-Híjar

Women's writing and charity in the Spanish Enlightenment

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María Lorenza de los Ríos y Loyo, the Marquesa de Fuerte-Híjar (Cádiz 1761–Madrid 1821), was a prominent member of the *Junta de Damas* of the *Real Sociedad Económica Matritense* (Women's Council of the Royal Madrid Economic Society) for over thirty years, from 1788 until almost 1820. She assumed leadership of the *Junta de Damas* during the difficult years of the Peninsular War, when many of its other members had to flee Madrid and when she suffered the loss of her husband and of most of her fortune. In the *Junta* and through her activities with the *Asociación de Caridad de Señoras* (Women's Charity Association), María Lorenza de los Ríos helped to reform and manage the *Inclusa*, the Madrid foundling hospital, the *Escuelas Patrióticas*, professional schools for poor girls, the *Galera*, the women's prison and the *Sala de Reservadas*, a ward for unwed pregnant women. The Marquesa de Fuerte-Híjar was active in Madrid cultural circles and *tertulias* (conversation groups) from the late 1780s until her death, and she became a writer who addressed Enlightenment concerns concerning women. In the public sphere, such as the reform of institutions that assisted the poor, she wrote detailed and well-reasoned technical reports for the *Junta de Damas* and the *Asociación de Caridad de Señoras*. She delivered in a public act a ceremonial eulogy for Queen María Luisa de Parma, patron of the *Junta de Damas*. For the *Real Sociedad Económica Matritense*, she produced a translation of an article about the work of the American inventor Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford. In the intimate sphere of sociability shared with her husband, friends and colleagues in Madrid, she wrote about the challenges Enlightened women faced in love and marriage in two plays that were most likely performed privately in her own *tertulia*. Late in life she published an occasional poem written to console a friend for her son's death.

Fuerte-Híjar's work participates in a wider Catholic movement within Europe beginning in the late seventeenth century, in which lay women found together what Merry Wiesner-Hanks calls "a community with an active mission in the world" (Wiesner-Hanks 2006, 175–176). The *Asociación de Señoras* was founded by a priest, Pedro José del Portillo, in 1788, "to give