From Mysticism to Psychoanalysis:
Julia Kristeva's Love for Teresa of Avila

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ABSTRACT • The present paper shall focus on one specific aspect of Kristeva's interest in love and religion, namely on her account of Christian mysticism. The first part will investigate Kristeva's understanding of love with reference to Teresa's mystical experience as well as the psychoanalytic process. The second part—focusing more explicitly on issues of language and writing—will locate Kristeva's reading of Teresa within the broader context of her revolt project by claiming that Teresa may serve as an example for Kristeva's concept of "intimate revolt," thus attributing to her life and writing a political dimension and turning love into an aspect of revolt.

KEYWORDS • Julia Kristeva, Teresa of Avila, Love, Mysticism, Psychoanalysis

Julia Kristeva has written a lot about love and a lot about religion, and she always did so from the perspective of her psychoanalytic background. Already her 1983 *Histoires d'amour* (Engl. *Tales of Love*, 1987) explores Christian love-related themes by evoking psychoanalytic concepts (e. g. "Freud and Love," God is Love"). Her 2008 "novel" *Teresa my Love. An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila* (translated into English in 2015) is a love declaration from Kristeva to Teresa. The main protagonist of the text, French psychoanalyst and academic Sylvia Leclercq (a barely disguised alter ego for Kristeva), becomes obsessed with the writings of 16th century Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila and embarks on a trip to Spain, so as to reconstruct Teresa's life and thoughts. Although labelled a "novel," the text is a combination of various genres: close readings of Teresa's texts and narratives about her life, accounts of Sylvia's life in Paris and her trip to Spain (including lengthy email correspondences), technical elaborations of very specific psychoanalytic problems and issues, a four-act play (with Leibnitz, Spinoza, and God himself as protagonists), and a letter from Sylvia to Denis

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Diderot. As one reviewer put it, the text "creates a thoroughly disorienting experience for the reader."[1] Quoting extensively from Teresa of Avila's writings (drawing from her autobiographical texts as well as her letters and her poetry), Kristeva's intertextual approach connects the vastly different time periods (16th century and 21st century) and life contexts by interrelating various experiences and expressions of love and by setting up an affinity between mysticism and the psychoanalytic process.

Teresa My Love—Mysticism and Psychoanalysis

The narrative skeleton of Kristeva's book is made up of the biographical facts of Teresa of Avila's life, starting with her childhood, her voluntary entry into the Carmelite order, her years of suffering from bodily ailments, her rise as a writer, her conflicts within the order and with the inquisition, her role as foundress of numerous Carmelite convents, all the way to her death. These biographical "facts" are conveyed partly through Teresa's own texts, partly through a contemporary psychoanalytic reading of those texts by Sylvia Leclercq (as stated already, a disguised Kristeva).

Making a trained psychoanalyst the reader and admirer of Teresa renders the connections and resemblances between mysticism and psychoanalysis as the basic structuring elements of this text. "There is no denying the affinities between mysticism and psychoanalysis,"[2] with love serving as one of the main connecting links between the two. Going back to Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Kristeva explains these "affinities" in terms of the relationship between the Ego and the Id.

> "The path of mystical belief plunges the ego into the id by means of a sort of sensual autoeroticism that confers a kind of omnipotence on the id… The analytic cure is addressed to the same pleasurable encounter of ego and id, but allows these two psychic apparatuses to circulate, by means of the transference words, from the id to the ego and back, from the ego to the id. Resemblances? Absolutely."[3]

[1] Abby Kluchin, "Review: Teresa, My Love," *the revealer. a review of religion & media* (August 26, 2015), 3. https://therevealer.org/review-teresa-my-love/

[2] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love. An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila*, trans. Lorna Scott Fox (New York, Columbia University Press, 2015), 59.

[3] Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 11.

In *Teresa My Love*, these basic affinities and resemblances between mysticism and psychoanalysis are explored with respect to love in that love plays a central role for mysticism as well as the psychoanalytic encounter.

For Kristeva—creating the psychoanalyst Sylvia Leclercq as main protagonist in order to read Teresa of Avila's texts from a psychoanalytic point of view—love signifies a partial boundary breakdown that is supposed to "soften" the necessary and unavoidable experience of distancing and separation. The loving merger assures that separation is not experienced as a traumatic experience that—in the worst case—ends in psychosis. If cast within a loving context, separation does not lead to self-destruction but becomes bearable and acceptable. This necessarily entails to overcome traditional (metaphysical) oppositions, such as inside/outside, me/other, mind/body, or spirit/senses. Love, for Kristeva, is not idealized as some fictional unity or oneness but, rather, allows the individual subject to go through the necessary steps of separation or address traumatic experiences without losing itself in either nihilism or psychosis.

This coexistence of separation *and* a boundary breakdown made possible through love can be seen in a variety of ways in the text. For example, in Teresa's love for God as a dissolution of her self-identity ("'you in me' and 'me in you'"[4]) while experiencing at the same time a distancing which enables her to write; in the overcoming of the metaphysical opposition between mind/spirit and the body by Teresa describing her ecstasies and raptures in terms of bodily states[5] while drawing upon the intellect as well as imagination at the same time;[6] in a break-down between inside and outside,[7] with visible and discernible bodily states being the markers of this inner life (her "interior castle"); or in Teresa's engagement with affairs of this world, as seen in her reforms of the Carmelite order, at the risk of a break with the church hierarchy. Similarly, Kristeva's description of the psychoanalytic

[4] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 23.

[5] "Sometimes my pulse almost stops… and my arms are straight and my hands so stiff that occasionally I cannot join them." Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Indianapolis—Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008), 125.

[6] E. g. when describing what she calls an "intellectual vision" as a seeing that is felt, ibid., 176.

[7] Her raptures causing phenomena that "produce their effect both interiorly and exteriorly," ibid. 120.

transference-countertransference process also assumes a temporary dissolution of self-boundaries, thus indicating a form of love between the analyst and the analysand—with a separation reinstated after the completion of the analytic procedure. Lastly, Kristeva's love for Teresa manifests itself as a merging of texts, thereby offering an elaborate example for her view of intertextuality as a mutual interdependence of texts. Her reading, quoting, interpreting, and rephrasing of Teresa von Avila's rich corpus of writing produces a text that makes it difficult—but not impossible—to detect the demarcating lines between Teresa's and Kristeva's thoughts. Thus, in spite of dealing with two distinct and unique authors, a loving merger takes place also on the level of writing.

It is this interconnection between separation and loving merger that is at the core of Kristeva's argument for the affinities between mysticism and psychoanalysis, addressed in *Teresa my Love* with respect to two thematic areas: (1) a psychoanalytic reading of Teresa, most importantly the role of the loving father and—related with that—the proximity between body and language, and (2) the claim that through transference and counter-transference, the psychoanalytic process itself—similar to a mystical union—can be successfully enacted only through love.

Some of the main building blocks of the Christian faith—for example, the constellation of a loving father who sacrifices his son, turning this sacrifice into a gift, the transformation (sublimation) of bodily desires into something spiritual, mental, lastly into language, the importance of the word and its connection to the flesh—allow Kristeva to insert her psychoanalytic toolkit to untangle and re-knot the various lines of attraction and devotion, of repetition and displacement, of immanence and transcendence. Kristeva brought these affinities between Christianity and psychoanalysis further into focus by rewriting the role of the father as presented in traditional psychoanalytic theory—a move that she also detects in Teresa who turns the harsh, punishing Father-God into a protective and caring Beloved, comparing it to a love relationship between two people.[8] What Teresa and Kristeva have in com-

[8] Talking about one of her visions, Teresa states: "It's like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems they understand each other. This must be similar to what happens in the vision…" Ibid., 180.

mon is that they had to reconfigure their respective dominant fathers—God in the one case, Freud and Lacan in the other.

According to Kristeva, Teresa revises the father figure of God so as to adapt it to her own needs.

> "…Teresa rewrote… the thousand-year-old story of God the Father… In her visions, through her pen, the tyrannical Beloved, the stern Father… softens into a Father so tender as to become an ideal alter ego, kind and rewarding, which draws the ego out of itself: ek-static… He is in her, He is her as she is Him".[9]

Teresa, originally conflicted about her relationship to God, feeling unworthy of his love, full of guilt and self-doubt, and bedridden with numerous ailments realized that she desired an ideal loving father if she were to overcome her masochistic destructive forces in order to write and to follow her commitment to her community by moving from her "interior castle" into the world. She needed to leave the original father figure behind and replace him with an imaginary ideal father so as to accommodate her capacity for sublimation and thereby ensure her entry into language and representation. In Kristeva's account, Teresa's turn towards her version of this "loving father of individual prehistory" (Freud) is—in reference to "the sublime Song of Songs"—"a meshing of eroticism and sublimation, of presence and flight, of body and words".[10] A smooth transition into the symbolic order requires support and understanding, it cannot result from threats or conflicts alone. But this ideal imaginary father can be constructed only at the price of leaving the original father behind; or, to put in different terms, it requires a displacement of the infantile desires for the father.[11] In Teresa's case, her actual father as well as the image of God she grew up with had to be overcome and substituted with a father of her own making, an imaginary father.

> "The ideal Father *is* the fantasy… a gendered representation that rises above sexuality: he is a 'father,' and so a progenitor, but 'ideal' because defined by his symbolic function. A crossroad figure that stands between desire and meaning, passion and thought".[12]

[9] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 12.
[10] Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, 49.
[11] See Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 179.
[12] Ibid, 175–176.

Whereby, for Kristeva, fantasy is not opposed to reason: "… fantasies *think*, like dreams think; and their thinking—which is not the same as reasoning—uncovers emotional truths that are opaque to reason".[13] Idealization leads to representation and thus away from uninhibited, pre-symbolic infantile desires.

As for Kristeva, she replaces Lacan's threatening, castrating father by introducing an imaginary "loving father" (drawing upon Freud's notion of a "father in individual prehistory"), who intervenes at the point of the child's separation from the mother's body, thus before the onset of the oedipal crisis. This assumption of a pre-oedipal, loving father is a further elaboration of Kristeva's notion of the semiotic,[14] a pre-linguistic space, bound to the body of the mother, which makes future signification possible. Inventing a loving father counteracts the dominance of the mother body during the pre-linguistic period. This archaic, loving father, a combination of the maternal and paternal, or what Kristeva calls "the father-mother conglomerate,"[15] provides love and support for the child during the process of separation from the body of the mother, thereby paving the way for its entry into the symbolic order. This loving third prepares the subject's rocky transition from narcissism and autoeroticism to the Oedipal conflict and thus into language. In the words of Kelly Oliver:

> "(T)his identification with the imaginary father… allows the child to 'ab-jet' its mother's body and thereby separate from her. But the separation from the mother's body is not tragic because it is supported by the imaginary father, which is the mother's love itself".[16]

Teresa as well as Kristeva rewrite the function of the father in terms of an imaginary being who offers love, support, and protection, thereby opening a metonymic chain from God to actual father, to Freud, to the role of the father in psychoanalysis, to the place of the analyst. This rewriting of the father position (in Christianity as well as psychoanalysis) assures a smooth

[13] Ibid., 175.

[14] For a more detailed explanation of Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, see part 2 of the present text.

[15] Referring to "the maternal desire for the Phallus," Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 40. On the ideal father see also Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 171–186.

[16] Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva. Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington—Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 79.

transition into the symbolic realm by bringing the body into language rather than leaving it behind.

> " 'And the Word was made flesh,' (John 1:14)… Teresa recognizes herself in Christ's incarnation and resurrection and appropriates them… she rediscovers willy-nilly how intrinsic to the human condition is the capacity for representation-sublimation-idealization, and how perpetually under threat".[17]

Entering the symbolic order is not facilitated through the threat of castration (or the threat of hell, for that matter), it is not about filling a lack, but rather, the word always has been flesh, the flesh always had meaning, but it requires loving support to give these rudimentary meaning-configurations of individual prehistory the right direction. Love cannot be pure merger—the child has to separate from the mother's body, Teresa has to realize that her writing is only possible if she allows her ecstasies of bodily unity with the Beloved to be interrupted by the already established linguistic codes. "You rose… to a grandiose sublimation… Few have ever achieved so complete a convergence of regression and reason".[18] Teresa's lover-God as well as the imaginary loving father of individual prehistory in psychoanalysis, both exercise their love in terms of a refusal of an absolute merger. The loving relationship is one of *jouissance* as well as pain, of gaining autonomy and independence through suffering. The loving father-God paves the way for an entry into the law, into the symbolic order, back into the world, while at the same time maintaining the intensity of the loving relationship which undercuts the law, the symbolic order, the demands of the world.

But not only is the loving Christian God who sacrifices his son mirrored in the early processes of subject formation within psychoanalytic theory. According to Kristeva, the psychoanalytic process itself is a form of loving merger and subsequent separation. If the goal in the processes of transference and countertransference is for the analyst to interpret and to give meaning, he/she can do so only if motivated by love.

> "We psychoanalysts call it *transference*: lover melts into loved and loved into lover; you know all about that Teresa… listening lovingly, a response known as *countertransference*. The therapist in love with her patient embarks on it because only thus

[17] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 173.
[18] Ibid., 69–70.

> can she pick up the other's truth… before disengaging from this countertransferential love…"[19]

It is this loving attitude of the analyst which allows Kristeva to approach Christian love in terms of idealization and sublimation so as to overcome the destructive tendencies of the death drive, of masochism, and pain. Her view of Teresa's mysticism is already anticipated in her analysis of Christian love in "God is Love" (1987):

> "The killing of the body is the path through which the body-Self has access to the Name of the Other who loves me and makes of me a Subject… A triumph of idealization through a sublimatory elaboration of suffering… a sublimatory overtaking of the masochistic position inasmuch as it conditions idealization."[20]

Whereby sublimation, for Kristeva, is the affective grounding of a desire to know and the power to imagine, both negotiated in terms of signification.

Teresa's texts exemplify on several levels Kristeva's psychoanalytic reading of Christianity—taking the loving father as lover, thus reciprocating the love and accepting his gift; the prominent role the body plays for the experience of this loving relationship with God; the equation of flesh and word with flesh becoming word and words signifying through the flesh; Teresa's attempts to self-analyze and turning her "interior castle" into the space for an analytic process with herself; Teresa's various forms of sublimation by turning the masochistic suffering during her early years into a form of *jouissance*, which enables her to actively engage with the world through her reform of the Carmelite order. Statements such as the following certainly justify a psychoanalytic reading:

> "That which comes from heaven (…so admirable a knowledge of God…) causes more torment because the desire increases in such a way that… the intense pain sometimes takes away sensory consciousness… The experience resembles the death agony with the difference that the suffering bears along with it such great happiness that I don't know what to compare it to."[21]

[19] Ibid., 65–66.
[20] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 146.
[21] Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, 125.

In short, as Maria Margaroni put it, in Kristeva's reading, Teresa becomes "the grandmother of psychoanalysis,"[22] foreshadowing crucial aspects of psychoanalysis by the way she puts her mystical experience into writing.

Love as Revolt—Teresa's Contemporary Relevance

Kristeva's fascination with and love for Teresa of Avila gains a political dimension if placed within the broader context of her oeuvre. Teresa (in Kristeva's presentation) can be read as a figure of revolt. Her relationship to God/her lover, the writings of her body, the trials and tribulations of her "interior castle," her willingness to change the outside world, all this can be taken as part of Kristeva's answer to the contemporary crisis of meaning in the society of the spectacle—Teresa as exemplary figure for what Kristeva means by "intimate revolt."

In Kristeva's reading, Teresa is more than just a 16th century nun and mystic. Rather, as Sylvia Leclercq wonders in the text: "Might she also… be our contemporary?"[23] How can this "saint of the Counter-Reformation," an embodiment of the baroque, "the maverick thinker of the Self outside the Self,"[24] be our contemporary? The ailments inflicting her body certainly are contemporary, especially for women—anorexia, fatigue, insomnia, migraines, epilepsy, paralysis, strange bleedings…[25] So is Teresa's desire for an all-encompassing, transcendent love, a love that goes beyond this world while all along being firmly grounded in the bodily experiences of this world, a love—although transcendent—that empowers her to change this world for the better. This combination of a yearning for transcendence, for going beyond bodily-physical confinements while at the same time being concerned about life on earth is, in itself, not particularly indicative for the 16th century. Nor is Teresa's willingness to self-analyse by writing down her experiences, be they ruptures and ecstasies or ordinary events of everyday life. It all could happen now, it does happen now… Not in terms of mystical

[22] Maria Margaroni, "Julia Kristeva's Voyage in the Thérèsian Continent. The Malady of Love and the Enigma of an Incarnated, Shareable, Smiling Imaginary," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (2013), 87.
[23] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 5.
[24] Ibid., 20.
[25] See ibid., 9.

ecstasies but as a yearning for something beyond the commodity and entertainment culture that dominates the contemporary world. "(Y)our texts can and indeed must be read today and… for centuries to come".[26]

It is this contemporary relevance of Teresa which, in my view, makes her suitable to be understood in terms of a figure of revolt in Kristeva's sense—thereby going far beyond the 16th century. Kristeva's concept of "intimate revolt," as developed in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (2000) and *Intimate Revolt* (2002), rests on the assumption that only one's inner psychic life can serve as resource against the state of Western cultures at the end of the 20th century (and beyond), dominated as they are by images, spectacles, and commodity exchange. In the current situation, resistance is no longer a matter of political activism but of turning around and turning inside. Since revolt in the traditional political sense is no longer possible, attending to one's inner state of being is, according to Kristeva, the only chance we have. "(W)ho can revolt, and against what?"[27]—"submerged as we are in the culture of entertainment, the culture of performance, the culture of the show".[28] In Kristeva's view, contemporary Western culture is reigned by the pleasure principle with a focus on immediate, superficial satisfaction. Accordingly, this culture of the image and the market renders one's inner psychic life as superfluous. As she states in *New Maladies of the Soul*: "Modern man is losing his soul, but he does not know it…"[29] Inner life is replaced by hallucinatory images, artificial needs and pleasures, the shallowness of manipulated dreams. It is for those reasons that revolt, "intimate revolt" that is, has to start from this inner life. As Noël McAfee puts it: "We are losing our souls… we no longer have an 'inner garden,' a place to keep alive, nurture, and tend a meaning of our existence".[30]

Well, Teresa certainly was not in danger of losing her soul and she meticulously attended her "inner garden"—a revolt figure in Kristeva's sense. While Teresa of Avila knew nothing about the downsides of the society of

[26] Ibid., 62.

[27] Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt. The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 1, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8.

[28] Ibid., 6.

[29] Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 8.

[30] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York—London: Routledge,2004), 109.

the spectacle, she knew how to put to work the rich resources of her "interior castle" for changing the world, and she knew about the powers of the word without leaving her body behind. The strength she gained from putting into writing her inner life was motivated by her ongoing, devoted and meticulously explored love relationship with God her Beloved.

In Kristeva's account, exploring one's inner life—the search for a soul, so to speak—is also a turn towards cultural history, in particular the history of modernism, and its inherent connection to revolt, which is also in danger of being lost to the dominance of the spectacle: "The great moments of twentieth-century art and culture are moments of formal and metaphysical revolt".[31] Viewing expressions of culture as "critical conscience"[32] and understanding cultural history in terms of the social manifestations of psychic life, the turn towards the psyche is also always a turn towards representation. Thus, the revolt in question "… is not exclusively (realized) in the world of action… but in that of psychical life and its social manifestations (writing, thought, art) …"[33] The loss of one's soul can be equated with a loss of meaning—in the broadest linguistic sense. The seeming emptiness and superficiality of contemporary Western culture corresponds to a loss of the potential towards representation: "… all these symptomatologies share a common denominator—the inability to represent… such a deficiency of psychic representation hinders sensory, sexual, and intellectual life".[34]

Since, for Kristeva, psychic representation involves the "sensual, sexual, *and* intellectual life" (emphasis GP), the concept of "intimate revolt" evokes the very individual reworkings of a given cultural history. The focus on the inner life does not exclude "a certain type of culture and art… (that) is threatened, indeed impossible… the art and culture of revolt".[35] This double emphasis on the individual psychic-bodily level (the semiotic) and the realm of culture (the symbolic) locates "intimate revolt" in between the law and individual desire. This, in turn, produces a kind of *jouissance* that results from the tension between adherence to the law and challenging this very law on individual grounds (thus an "*intimate* revolt"). It is a revolt on the level

[31] Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, 7.
[32] Ibid., 6.
[33] Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt. The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 2, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.
[34] Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, 9.
[35] Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, 8.

of signification and representation. In short, it is a form of revolt that attempts to find *jouissance* by representing what cannot be represented within the common currency of the symbolic order—the sensuous, the bodily, the unconscious, neurotic/psychotic aberrations, in short, everything that does not conform to the dogma of identity in the production of meaning.

> "Thought or writing in revolt… attempt to find a representation (a language, a thought, a style) for this confrontation with the unity of law, being, and the self… the bringing to the fore of everything that puts the very possibility of unitary meaning to the test (such as the drive, the unnamable feminine, destructivity, psychosis, etc.)".[36]

In that this form of representation entails a collision with the law, the *jouissance* it brings about is necessarily accompanied by pain and suffering. Kristeva called the politics involved in her concept of "intimate revolt" "another politics"—a politics "of permanent conflictuality".[37] Again, this is a form of politics that has little to do with political activism in the traditional sense. However, it clearly is political in that it allows for the bodily, the sensory, but also the excluded and marginalized to enter the realm of established modes of representation. By this account, opening up new spaces within the signifying process on the individual level is a form of politics—a form of politics that coincides with the disruption of the symbolic order through the semiotic.[38]

If anybody was living a life of "permanent conflictuality" it was Teresa of Avila—conflicts with her father for entering an order, conflicts with herself over her destructive forms of masochistic autoeroticism, conflicts over her self-acclaimed status as the beloved of God, conflicts with the church hierarchy over her approach to the religious life of her order, conflicts in language over how to express what cannot be expressed. And she certainly experienced a "*jouissance* filtered through the passion of pain".[39] In analogy,

[36] Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 10.
[37] Ibid, 11.
[38] For a discussion of Kristeva's politics see Chanter, Tina, and Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, eds., *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity. The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); Sjöholm, Cecilia, *Kristeva and the Political* (London – New York: Routledge, 2005); Hansen, Sarah K. and Rebecca Tuvel, eds., *New Forms of Revolt. Essays on Kristeva's Intimate Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).
[39] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 400.

the psychoanalytic process itself can be described as a "permanent conflictuality" characterized by a similar tension between adherence to the law (the norms of society) vs. individual satisfaction. In their undoing of the concept of identity (with respect to the signifying process as well as subject formation), Teresa's mysticism as well as the analytic treatment can be conceived as forms of revolt in Kristeva's sense. And the revolutionary potential they both entail has as much to do with language as it does with love.

Teresa's devotion to God, the spiritually charged ecstasies of her body, her institutional reforms, all are inherently tied to her urge to write. "Teresa's ecstasy… is the doing of her writing… Language is not a vehicle, for her, but the very terrain of the mystical act".[40] And this mystical act, expressed in language, depends on the sensual-spiritual experience of a unity-separation with her Beloved. What describes Teresa could be claimed for psychoanalysis as well: "language is not (just) a vehicle" but the very activity of the psychoanalytic process itself which—via the (loving) interaction of two speaking subjects—unfolds in language.

Going all the way back to her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva has all along attributed a revolutionary potential to language. And furthermore, her theory of language is intrinsically tied to her concept of the subject as a "subject in process": "There is no self-aware self prior to our use of language".[41] Her theory of the semiotic and the symbolic is nothing less than a linguistic account of the conflict, described above, between the "law" and subjective (bodily) desires, setting up a pattern for the development of the subject as heterogeneous, torn by tensions, always in transition —a "subject in process," the opposite of a self-identical subject. Contrary to most linguistic theories, Kristeva presupposes a pre-symbolic stage (the semiotic) in which—although not yet regulated by the rules of syntax—meaning is nevertheless generated. Described with reference to Plato's notion of the *chora* as maternal space, this pre-symbolic type of meaning, structured like Freud's primary processes, is closely tied to the interaction with the mother body and the bodily pleasures and pains the child encounters in the process of separation thereof. Thus, subject formation is from the beginning tied to signifying processes in the broadest sense. In Kristeva's account, even after the onset of the symbolic order, the semiotic continues and dis-

[40] Ibid., 94.
[41] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, 29.

rupts the established codes of the symbolic; the semiotic is the foundation for meaning production but also challenges this meaning as soon as it enters the solidifying states of syntactic certainty. The destructive forces of the semiotic in the symbolic have a revolutionary power (to be seen in modernist poetry but also in the psychoanalytic encounter), in that they make manifest, within the symbolic order, the urges of the drives, affects, bodily functions, and pre-linguistic sensations.[42]

In Kristeva's view, we need both, the semiotic and the symbolic, to survive without drifting off into neurosis or psychosis: "For Kristeva signification is always heterogeneous, made up of both semiotic material rejection and symbolic stability".[43] And it is out of this tension between the semiotic and the symbolic that the subject (always a "subject in process") is developing—"the subject is an effect of linguistic processes,"[44] which produce meaning as continuously shifting and multiple. For Kristeva, neither the subject nor the signifying processes which constitute this very subject are in any sense stable or self-identical, indicating that her distrust in identity shapes her concept of the subject as well as her view of the symbolic order. "Kristeva… is concerned with discourses that call up a crisis in identity".[45] Exploring this "crisis in identity" in language, which is to say in writing, has the potential to lead to revolt in form of a "politics of conflictuality." And it is exactly that which Teresa, in Kristeva's reading, is doing.

Her attempts to bring her own body and its experiences into the text requires a style of writing that defies all identities and allows for modes of expression that simultaneously draw upon the semiotic and the symbolic.[46] Her

[42] For Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the symbolic see *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 19–106.

[43] Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva. Unraveling the Double-bind*, 94.

[44] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, 29.

[45] Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva. Unraveling the Double-bind*, 48.

[46] For example, her attempt to describe her visions while at the same time admitting that they cannot be described could be read in this direction. She tries to put something into words that escapes the symbolic order—neither a thought nor a mental image but some kind of a bodily state. According to Teresa, a vision can never be the product of human imagination, "for the beauty and the whiteness of one hand alone is completely beyond our imagination. It's impossible to see in a moment… things represented that… could not have been put together by the imagination, because they go far beyond… what we can comprehend here on earth." Nevertheless: "One cannot exaggerate the richness that the true vision leaves; it even gives health to the body and leaves it comforted." Teresa of

texts convey extremely private, often body-related experiences (the mystical experience), but also a tension between idealizations (often bordering on illusions) and—especially in her later period—pragmatic concerns about the state of her order and the world. In Teresa's writing, the demands of the Id are as present as a fragile Ego and her struggles with her own superego.

Expressed in psychoanalytic terms, it is Teresa's particular form of sublimation that renders her a perfect candidate for revolt in the sense of a "politics of conflictuality." According to Maria Margaroni, Kristeva's reading of Teresa's version of the mystical experience "helps her to elaborate, enrich and complicate"[47] her own theory of sublimation. In this context, Margaroni refers to "… the mediating role of language in the sublimatory process… the blurring of the distinction between appearance and reality and the uninhibited celebration of illusion" as well as "the amorous source of the imaginary".[48] Motivated by love and always with an eye on the writing process, Teresa is a figure of revolt in that she refuses to stay within the framework of traditional metaphysical distinctions and oppositions. By putting everything into writing, her visions (illusions?) gain the status of reality, what she "imagines" has as much of an impact as what she encounters in the so-called "real world," the pains of her body are also pains of her mind.

> "The physical suffering that inflames you carnally is gradually deployed just as much… in your mind. It invests language, writing, the multiplicity of attachments, and remains sublime. Better still, it becomes ever more sublime, ever more verbal and active".[49]

For Teresa, it is an idealized *jouissance* in suffering that guides her writings. Transforming one's very own carnality into language walks a collision course between radical individuality and adherence to the law of the symbolic order. Again, it is this refusal of any conventions of identity that renders Teresa a revolutionary figure. Far from repressing or denying her "interior castle," she finds a way to put it into words in spite of the conflicts this entail—conflicts with the church hierarchy, with the members of her order, with her own feelings of guilt, but last not least, conflicts with signify-

Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, 190–191.

47 Maria Margaroni, "Julia Kristeva's Voyage in the Thérèsian Continent," 83.

48 Ibid., 84.

49 Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 393.

ing conventions in that she says what should have remained unsaid. "(S)he pushes incarnation as far as erasing the last borders between *speaking* and *being*, meaning that she only speaks by being and only is by speaking".[50] And motivating this willingness to literally turn her flesh into words is her unbridled reliance on the experience of a loving relationship with her Father-God-Lover.

"Love as therapy: there is nothing better".[51] In Sylvia Leclercq's tracing, Teresa's life and psyche are mirrored in the experience of the psychoanalyst. "Are we carrying out… with our psychoanalytical way of comprehending and doing, one of those endless queryings of the divine? Or should I say, queryings of the very lucidity of love—of its elucidation?"[52] In a sense, the interconnection of volatile psychic states, language, love, and belief are presented as the core elements of the analytic process. As already stated, language is "the very vehicle" through which the entire process is conducted —there is no psychoanalytic encounter outside of language. Within this given framework, it is the analyst who gives meaning to the words of the patient, which turns him/her into some seemingly "god-like" figure. However, it is always possible that the meaning offered by the analyst fails to carry any signification for the analysand, it becomes superfluous, no connection is made. This is to say, the "god-like" position of the analyst is always fragile, in danger of undermining the outcome of the analytic procedure. Following Kristeva, any possible "success" (cure?) of the verbal interaction called analytic process depends on a mutual loving attention that allows the respective other to enter. Comparable to Teresa losing herself in the relationship with the Beloved, the process of transference-countertransference rests on a willingness to get involved and to allow for a permeability between the individual selves—"he in me, I in him," a querying of the "lucidity of love."

[50] Ibid., 441.

[51] Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 163.

[52] Julia Kristeva, *Teresa My Love*, 274.

Conclusion

In Kristeva's view, Teresa of Avila's mysticism as well as psychoanalysis rely on a loving encounter, they both are executed on the level of language with a disregard for the conventions of the symbolic order (including identity), an adapted version of Freud's notion of sublimation takes centre stage for the way language is used, and they both can be understood as a form of revolt in that the engagement with one's inner psychic self is treated as a form of resistance or a "politics of conflictuality."

Mysticism as well as psychoanalysis, Teresa of Avila as well as Julia Kristeva can be viewed in terms of an attempt to put into writing affects and bodily states, pleasure and pain, needs and desires. Teresa turning the ecstasies of her body into texts under the guidance of her Beloved resonates some of the main themes Kristeva addressed in her distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic but also, her understanding of the psychoanalytic process itself. One could say, Teresa puts into practice what Kristeva tried to explore on a theoretical level—"to render meaning sensible"[53]—which might be at the core of Kristeva's love for Teresa, and which turns Teresa into a figure of "intimate revolt."

[53] Ibid, 105.