



## A Jesuit Mystic's Feminine Melancholia: Jean-Joseph Surin SJ (1600-1665)

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*This essay on the mysticism of exorcist Jean-Joseph Surin suggests that the depression from which he suffered can be understood as a destabilization of the masculine identity he wished to uphold when his experience was dismissed as "feminine melancholia." By incorporating the suffering of two women he is led into a fluid state in which his relation to the divine will become erotic. The inquiry concludes by juxtaposing feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's views on melancholia with those of Surin's, bringing into a dialogue these two perspectives.*

One day in 1645, French Jesuit priest Jean-Joseph Surin, who some years earlier became famous for delivering from demonic possession the nuns at the convent of Loudun, tried to kill himself by jumping out of a second floor window. The scene at the end of the film *The Exorcist* (1971), where the Jesuit priest defeats the devil by assenting to become possessed and then committing suicide by throwing himself out the window, down the stairs, is based on Surin's life. The only difference is that Surin survived, only to fall victim to depression. The real aftermath of the story would not have made a captivating Hollywood ending.

The extraordinary events that led to Surin's despair were popularized by Aldous Huxley in his *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and by Ken Russell in the film, *The Devils* (1973). They focus on the lurid aspects of the story. Early modern France was rife with beliefs in demonic activity, so when the relationship between priest Urbain Grandier and the nuns at Loudun, especially the superior Jeanne des Anges, acquires erotic overtones, he is accused of bringing the devil into the convent. He is burned at the stake on charges of witchcraft, while chaos reigns among the nuns who behave erratically, acting out symptoms indicating possession such as rage and increased libido. Perhaps because of its sensationalist appropriations for popular consumption, these events reflecting an important element in the mindset of seventeenth century France have been little studied. The only scholarly study of the Grandier and des Anges case is Michel de Certeau's *The Possession at Loudun* (2000).<sup>1</sup> While de Certeau exposes the fraudulent activities of those involved and the dangerous superstitions of spectators, he also claims that there is an 'otherness' element that cannot be approached with the historian's tool or reduced to socio-cultural circumstances. As the modern editor of Surin's works, de Certeau is also aware of the forgotten drama of the Jesuit's life after the Loudun episode. Surin's autobiography has not been studied in depth, so its riches remain unearthed.<sup>2</sup>

In his autobiography, *Triumph of Divine Love Over the Powers of Hell*, and in its more theological sequel *Experimental Science of Otherworldly Matters*, Surin narrates how he overcame his own demonic possession, which for twenty years led him to believe that he had lost the love of Christ and was damned for eternity. We learn that after he exorcised mother superior Jeanne des Anges, he was thrown into a despair that alternated with occasional moments of mystical consolation. In the books he defends himself against the accusation that his mystical experience is nothing but 'feminine' melancholia. We will see that Surin's mystical melancholia indeed becomes feminized as understood at the time. Moreover, his own masculine identity mutates in a mystical relationship with the divine that subverts preconceived notions of gender stability. Only then was he able to surmount his depression and attain the joy he longed for.

In this essay I will argue that Surin's melancholia involves an incorporation of the suffering of two women. He assimilates the suffering of Jeanne des Anges, transforming it into an erotic and ecstatic joy, by identifying both Jeanne and himself with the longing and mystical ecstasy he found in the writings of Teresa of Avila. His relation with these two women shapes his own experience of demonic possession and affective mysticism, both of which were dismissed by many of his contemporaries as feminine disturbances. I will conclude by engaging Surin's views on melancholia in dialogue with those of feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's work will allow us to gain some insights into Surin's melancholia. At the same time Surin's text will offer us the possibility of extending Kristeva's theory, escaping the temptation to reduce Surin's lived experience to psychoanalytic phenomena. Suspending a final judgment on these issues will be a sign of respect for that 'otherness' that de Certeau encountered and which now the reader will confront.

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It was in 1633, during the reign of Louis the Just, while Cardinal Richelieu was prime minister of France's government and doing very illustrious things for the good of the Church and State that Our Lord allowed a terrible attack from Hell to happen at the town of Loudun. (Surin, 1990, p. 11)

Thus begins Surin's recollection of the events at the convent of Loudun that led to his spiritual malaise. Here he frames his text within a specific historical context, so that future readers will not dismiss his terrifying narration as product of his own fantasy or that of addled women, and within a theological context, so that these events described will be seen as part of a divine plan.

Surin encases the episode within the ecclesiastical renewal and invigoration program that Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) was leading. Church and throne were allied at this time, forming a bulwark against Protestant incursions. Religious orders flourished under regal support, so anything that happened at the convent of Loudun was a matter of state. Indeed, the events quickly became a national affair.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Surin's acknowledging the church and state is relegated to the introduction. His involvement in

the affair was not related to a desire for fame. His incursion was for him but a sign of his belief that his life was guided by divine providence.

Surin arrives on the scene as reinforcement in a battle in which several exorcists had failed to deliver the nuns from the evil beings that had taken control of them. Surin tells us that it was believed that the origin of the possession was some kind of sexual magic performed by corrupt priest Urban Grandier that led to “carnal love.” Surin wants to tell the whole story and say that demonic hatred was more at fault than any kind of “love.” His goal is to show how this hatred was counteracted by God’s love for these women. Writing in the third person, Surin says that “because of the misery of their condition, God gave him such a great love for them that, seeing them, he was not able to stop himself from shedding copious tears or from being moved by a strong desire to help them” (1990, p. 20). He discovers that the possession is centered on the convent’s superior, Jeanne des Anges. His desire to be of help to them will be linked to his intense desire for God; yet, these desires will also be accompanied by sexual desire, which, as we shall see, will be an element in the spiritual battle against the demonic forces. The struggle for Jeanne des Anges’ soul will foreshadow what will happen in his own for the next twenty years.

When Surin met Jeanne des Anges, she suffered symptoms that many at the time would have interpreted as those arising from melancholic humors, yet he ascribes them to a demonic attack. He tells us that that the devil threw her

through malignant operations, not only in a great spiritual loathing, but also in such bodily languidness that she seemed to be dying; her face became emaciated and diminished, her spirit dull-minded, her heart overwhelmed. She found everything insipid. Her will was entirely in God, but her powers were so blunted that she could barely pay attention to what she was told. (Surin, 1990, p. 106)

Since Surin was interested in demonology he probably knew from his readings in the subject that these symptoms did not necessarily arise from supernatural causes. He could have learned from influential demonologist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499) that an abundance of black bile “makes the spirits heavier and colder, afflicts the mind continually with weariness, dulls the sharpness of the intellect, and keeps the blood from leaping around the Arcadian’s [melancholic’s] heart” (quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 92). We can see all these signs in the description above. Another influential demonologist, Johann Weyer, in his *Of Deceiving Demons* (1562), claims that “many persons beset by melancholia are thought to be possessed, and vice versa ... so there is need for careful judgment here, to distinguish between the two afflictions (which are often found together in many instances)” (quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 104).

Throughout his book, Weyer leans towards the view that melancholia is more often caused by imbalances in bodily humors that resulted in symptoms such as those of Jeanne des Anges above. Even in the case of demonic possession, the devil takes advantage of a natural imbalance instead of being the cause for it. This was often the case with women whose humors made them more susceptible to demonic activity:

that crafty schemer the Devil thus influences the female sex, that sex which by reason of temperament is inconstant, credulous, wicked, uncontrolled in spirit, and because of its feelings and affections, which it governs only with difficulty melancholic; he especially seduces stupid, worn-out, unstable old women. (Quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 98)

Weyer is here repeating common assumptions of the time. Surin knows from his ministerial relationship with Jeanne that these negative prejudices do not apply to her. His admiration for her is revealed throughout the text. "The natural disposition of this woman was excellent from the spiritual side, very strong; her temper was gentle, her judgment solid, yet she was very weak in health" (Surin, 1990, p. 23). Rather than describe des Anges as melancholic, Surin prefers to use the term *acedia*. He defines *acedia* as

a heaviness opposed to the spirit of fervor through which the Devil slips all the vices.... Its poison consists in a deadening that he leaks into the senses, making the soul desire repose, allowing itself to slip into a restive state, into a vague entrainment of thoughts, a blunted and sorrowful demeanor. (Surin, 1990, p. 94)

The early modern scholars above would have seen these symptoms described by Surin as a case of melancholia. Even today a psychoanalyst could make this interpretation. We will return to this but, briefly jumping ahead for the purpose of comparison, we find Kristeva defining melancholia as "the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the so called manic phase of exaltation" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 9). We can see how Jeanne's *acedia* fits the first half of this definition. Kristeva's asymbolia shows up when Jeanne's "powers" become "blunted" and she is lost in an entrainment of thoughts that she cannot communicate. She becomes inhibited, a "deadenning" invading her mind, with the result that she cannot pay attention to what is spoken to her. Later, Surin will tell us that this behavior will alternate with moments of intense rage in which powerful demons take control of her. Kristeva's "manic phase of exaltation" shows up here, making the argument for melancholia seem uncontested. But for now let us stay with Surin's approach, which I will later compare to Kristeva's.

Surin's diagnosis is that a demonic manifestation in the form of *acedia* needs to be confronted here through the ritual of exorcism. Surin's main weapon is prayer. A favorite weapon of the devil is lust. A battle will ensue in which Surin believes that he vanquishes the demon, yet "the enemy returns and becomes sensible in the same shape of a serpent, coiling itself among the members and biting in order to take away repose and disturb purity" (Surin, 1990, p. 37). Surin finds himself tempted to sin against chastity, so he finds a remedy by "turning to the Holy Virgin and imagining her with the child Jesus as he had seen her in paintings" (Surin, 1990, p. 37). This last method was promoted by the Jesuits as a way of confronting the demon of lust. Surin's honesty reveals the reliability of the text as a personal account, since from the beginning he wanted to distance the possession from being connected to "carnal love." We do not know the object of his lust but it seems justified to assume that it was Jeanne des Anges. Love for the mother superior, showing

itself in its “spiritual” and “carnal” aspects, would become the basis for his later identification with her, as discussed below.

Surin and Jeanne together fight the demonic serpent. “She felt something come out from her head something that exhausted her, and saw in front of her a terrifying monster like a dragon ... she bravely strikes at it and suddenly it disappears, after which she found herself free” (Surin, 1990, p. 107). This successful battle against one of the demons strengthens them both to fight the Devil himself, who finally leaves her when, some time later, he receives the Eucharist from Surin. Thus ends Jeanne’s possession and, after a few days, Surin’s will begin.

Surin’s identification with the woman he loved enough to battle the Devil with her became so strong that after the exorcism he assimilated many of her symptoms. The price of delivering Jeanne des Anges from her suffering had been not only taking the suffering upon himself, but also inviting the demon to accept him as a hostage in exchange. He recalls that at one moment during the exorcism he felt carried by an ardor, wishing to “participate in all her temptations and miseries, even to the point of becoming possessed by the evil Spirit, provided that He gave him the freedom to enter her and devote himself to her soul” (Surin, 1990, p. 27). This wish to be one with Jeanne was granted to the extreme that the identification became complete. The signs of demonic possession did not take long to show up after the exorcism. He began to feel that he had become separated from God. Christ had abandoned and left him at the mercy of the Devil, his soul forever lost:

he lost the ability to communicate, becoming mute for seven months without being able to say Mass, read, or write. He was not able to dress or undress himself, or make any kind of movement. He fell into a malady unknown to doctors, their remedies having no effect. (Surin, 1990, p. 119)

Inhibition and asymbolia show up in Surin’s inability to act and in his mutism, which will occasionally be disrupted by exalted mystical moments in which he felt consoled by God:

At Loudun he began to receive, during the time of his obsession, communications from God that worked in his soul consoling it greatly with ardent spiritual fires. Every one of these days they would show themselves in such a way that he was not able to doubt that they came from God, surpassing all natural forces. (Surin, 1990, p. 170)

We can see in these two passages a new occurrence of melancholia. The claim that his malady was unknown to his doctors is Surin’s interpretation. Although in the passage above he is careful to mention that it surpassed all natural forces, midway through his text he admits that “most people, even the wisest, tended to say that it was nothing but a melancholic humor or devotional illusion, or fantasy” (Surin, 1990, p. 221). Although at the end of his narrative he will accept that melancholy is somehow involved, he will give his condition a supernatural origin. He believes this because “he had read many things from mystical writers about their inner sufferings” (Surin, 1990, p. 175) and saw how similar his

state was to theirs. He finds precedent for his despair and his consolations and “ardent spiritual fires” in these writers. But before he can describe his mysticism, he must address the charge that his experience is nothing but feminine melancholia.

Besides their autobiographical intention, *Triumph* and *Science* are part of a series of works in which Surin defends mystical theology from clerical colleagues who dismiss it as the fervid imagination of “little women” (*femmelettes*). One of the priests Surin writes against derides those “devout melancholics and mystics” who have their “castle in Spain” (de Certeau, 1963, p. 45). This last reference is an attack on the increasing influence of the writings of Teresa of Avila, specially her *Life* and the *Interior Castle*.<sup>4</sup> Surin, as we will see, was strongly influenced by Teresa, and yet he felt the need to defend himself in *Triumph* against the feminization of mystical experiences.

These are not the sweetness gustos of “little women” (*femmelettes*). Many thinking and wise men have contempt for these [experiences] and compare them to the tears and sensibilities of some women. This is something else. These are spiritual experiences, real and efficacious, that hearten the soul, a demonstration of God and divine things. Truly they are much more than sweetnesses. (Surin, 1990, p. 325)

Surin here defends mystical theology by turning not to its origin, as he does elsewhere, but to its fruits, such as consolation in the midst of despair and knowledge of the divine. Yet, as an attempt to avoid a feminization of mystical experience, Surin’s text is a failure. His mysticism arises out of identification with Jeanne des Anges, which will then be exchanged for identification with Teresa of Avila. Although he defends his arguments by turning to the authority of the Church fathers, he extracts from them the message that “a simple *femmelette* can love God more than the greatest doctor in the world” (Surin, 1990, p. 226). We will see that Surin not only defends these *femmelettes* but become one of them.

In other more systematic treatises, Surin refers to most of the fathers of the church; yet, except for Paul, the attention given to Teresa surpasses by far the energy he dedicates to patristic writers. So it is no surprise that in *Triumph* and *Science*, Teresa has an important role. During his melancholic phase, Surin’s identification became so extreme that his more intense attacks occurred during Teresa’s holy day:

sometimes I became a desperate soul, like the fifteenth of October, day of Saint Theresa. She is a saint for whom I have great affection. That day, as in every year on the day of her holy day, my disposition changes and I was brought down to the verge of death. (Surin, 1990, p. 233)

Surin felt himself this day at the “entrance of ancient darkness,” repeating a motif that appears throughout the text, his being found guilty and condemned to hell. The reference to the dark entrance recalls Teresa’s transport to a place in hell, which she believed was reserved for her as punishment for her sins. In this vision she found herself at the “entrance of a long and strait tunnel ending in a deep, dark, and narrow oven” (Teresa de

Avila, 1998, p. 299). In that place, “there was no light but only obscure darkness” (Teresa de Avila, 1998, p. 300). This episode is narrated after Teresa describes, in the previous chapter, her struggle with demons and despair. On Teresa’s holy day, Surin again attempts suicide by jumping out of the window, but is unable to do so because he had broken his leg during the earlier attempt.

On a later fifteenth of October he also experienced great anxiety, yet he was able to engage in ministry. In order to do this he availed himself of his desire for God to give him the strength to perform his preaching service. He was able to break his silence temporarily. He says, “the good words that came from my mouth emerged, despite the despair, from the deep desire that my heart had for God” (Surin, 1990, p. 234). The desire that strengthens him is linked later with the presence of Teresa:

His frailty was extreme, yet nevertheless he was as if elevated in spirit. He saw in front of him, written in the air with large letters, the words PURE LOVE. Beside them was written: TERESA OF JESUS. At that moment he thought that Saint Teresa was present, as if she had come from the heavens, which seemed to be opening, a clearing that forestalled the thunderstorm. (Surin, 1990, p. 271)

In the midst of his desperation he holds to the figure of Teresa. We can read the appearance of these words as representing his movement towards escaping the silence in which he had been submerged.

After this vision he had the desire to rest, so he returned to his chamber. As soon as he lay down a memory of Jeanne des Anges surfaced. He recalled how years earlier at Loudun, on a fifteenth of October, he had a vision of a suffering Christ. The same vision was happening now. Here then a transition occurs, initiated by memories of Teresa and Jeanne, from a damning Christ to identification with Christ’s suffering:

I had an impression of suffering Christ. I was fastened to my inner center, and found myself as if crucified for three hours. The first hour the agony was so extreme that I could not do anything. This mystery happened in my spirit and my body, as if I had just been nailed. (Surin, 1990, p. 330)

In the next two hours he shares Christ’s suffering. This was but one of several moments in which his body becomes the place where his desire for Christ is manifested. Christ becomes the divine “spouse.” His suffering is then transformed into joy in an erotic mystical encounter with the beloved:

when I was on my bed, I felt something descend over me. I was penetrated, as a sponge would be, by a liquid from heaven that infused everything and gave me an indescribable joy and sweetness. There was such a release of melancholy, about which nothing can be said. Then, in a short-lived moment, it seemed that my soul was in glory. (Surin, 1990, p. 271)

Here we find the final stage of Surin's melancholy. What first began as the incorporation of Jeanne des Anges' melancholia is then distilled until only desire remained. The suffering dissipates. Erotic desire is not denied but transformed into something divine. The sexual aspect of mysticism is not metaphorized by Surin but accepted:

there can be something of this sweetness among married couples, which regulated by nature's order itself, and following God's design, have such an intimate bond and closeness of heart that it cannot be better expressed than the relationship between God and the soul. (Surin, 1990, p. 331)

In the passage above, Surin attempts to re-inscribe the eroticism of his experiences within divinely inspired heterosexual social structures. But the description of his mystical encounters betrays the fact that the process of feminization which began with melancholia only accelerated when it became mystical. Had Surin been a woman, his mystical text may have been dismissed as another case of female hysteria. As a male who not only accepts the authors of this tradition of female mysticism as authoritative,<sup>5</sup> but incorporates their spirituality into his own, Surin is subverting gender in a way that some ecclesiastical authorities found threatening. At least one of his texts will be found in inquisitors' lists. Near the end of Surin's lifetime his own superiors would censor his writings (Surin, 1990, p. 340). We can discern in Surin's apologetical passages how hostile his environment was to female spirituality, so it is not surprising that his text was controversial. But by then Surin's experience of the loss and regaining of Christ will make him immune to such a lesser loss as that of reputation. If it was God's will, he was happy to "die in shame as did his Son" (Surin, 1990, p. 341). His identification with Jeanne and Teresa, and now with Christ, strengthened him to face any future loss.

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It is tempting to reduce Surin's experience to just another case of melancholia. If we return to Kristeva's definition of melancholia, we can see that every one of its signs occurs in Surin's case. Recalling Kristeva's definition, melancholia can be described as "the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the manic phase of exaltation" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 9). As we saw above, Surin identified Jeanne des Anges' melancholic inhibition as an attack by the demon of *acedia*. With regard to his own inhibition, he admitted that melancholia was involved. This state, which became asymbolic when he lost the ability to speak, was broken only in those manic phases of exaltation he called mystical. Kristeva's investigations about the causes of melancholia can therefore shed some light on Surin's text. Yet, reading the latter only in the light of the former will give us a skewed perspective. Kristeva's work does not arise from an objective as opposed to Surin's subjective approach. Her text on melancholia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), like Surin's, was written after an experience of loss.<sup>6</sup> Rather than

seeing psychoanalysis as the method and the mystic as the subject, I will engage both of them in a dialogue about the loss of an object of desire which can be both male and female.

Kristeva extends the definition of melancholia to include as essential a “mourning for the maternal object.” After birth, all human beings begin a process of separation from the mother that will establish a precedent for all subsequent experiences of loss. The maternal “object” is more like a “preobject.” The individual’s relationship with this preobject will determine how his or her future object relationships will develop, including what the reaction will be in the case of the loss of an object of love. In her work, Kristeva discusses texts written by melancholic mystics whose experiences of loss express, in her view, a longing for reunification with the mother. She will tell us that “those in despair are mystics – adhering to the preobject, not believing in Thou, but mute and steadfast devotees of their own inexpressible container” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 14). Like Surin, these mystics believed that the divine Thou was no longer present for them. What for Kristeva is longing for a return to the maternal container, the womb, is for these mystics a longing to return to the love of God. In Christianity the mystic’s loss has been represented as the loss of the figure of God in Christ. Surin would not agree with reducing this experience to loss of the mother. On the other hand, we can speculate that he may not completely dismiss Kristeva’s text. As he does in the following poem, written after the events discussed previously, he might identify the longing for a mother as longing for a maternal God who is none other than Christ the beloved.

The Soul, from a glorious fire saintly hurled,  
carries deeply within her thoughts the arrow of Love.  
She seeks from her God the gentle embrace  
that will assuage her pain and her banishment.  
At the point of approaching the royal chambers  
of the lamb that awaits her as a loyal bridegroom,  
she sings of deeds of love and of severe trials,  
of the evils that have made her sigh down here below.  
Yet, beloved Love, when she sets foot upon your path  
she wants to speak so that the world will listen:

When God emerged from the depths of his majesty  
his power saw herself pregnant.  
Water, earth, and sky, the whole vast sphere,  
were the unconstrained fruit of this Love.  
Then, when she pulled out the world from her side,  
she placed each thing in its appropriate space.  
Love insinuates himself everywhere  
in this great universe that he has designed  
through a secret instinct, forceful and benign.  
He joins every member together with its neighbor,  
desiring to join through strife

the highest with the lowest, the heavens with the earth,  
and making co-exist through enchanting attractions  
the opposed forces of diverse elements. (Surin, 1957, p. 61)

Surin recounts here again how the melancholia discharged when his banishment was revoked was assuaged by an encounter with the divine bridegroom. Adopting a female stance while awaiting the male Christ, the mystic tells of the soul's sorrows. Yet, the soul's pain is transformed into joy as she recalls the majesty of Love, who alternates between being male and female. The gender destabilization that Surin experienced during his trials is now attributed to a divine maternal figure, Love. Through the "strife" of the experience of suffering something new can be created. Love heals the rupture of an original loss that separated heaven from earth. Love reverses through attraction what has been divided into high and low, masculine and feminine. For Surin, love can attain what for Kristeva is impossible: a return to a both masculine and feminine mother in an erotic embrace.

Surin believed that he gained insights of God only through the experience of God's absence. What Kristeva refers to as 'mystic atheism' can make sense within Surin's worldview. For Kristeva the absence experienced in loss is not only absence of an object but absence of names to refer to that object:

Let me say that this sacred, this "thing without a name" may betray, beyond the depressive silences of our mystic, a suggestion of disbelief. In fact if the divine has no name, does it truly exist? One may believe in it, one may also doubt it. The latencies of a mystic atheism (perhaps the only one, which has nothing to do with the atheistic religion of the so-called materialist intellectuals I told you about last time), and, I think, of a subtle, specifically feminine atheism, take root, it seems to me, in that suspicion borne aloft on the powers of the Word, in that retreat to the unfathomable continent, concealed from the sensible body. (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p. 37)

Kristeva refers here to doubts about a divine presence that would support the meaning of it all. This meaning is lost in the midst of depression, such as that which led Surin to admit that "although a profession of atheism is not an ordinary thing among Christians, nevertheless it is a temptation that can be conceived in the spirit" (Surin, 1990, p. 343). Kristeva would read Surin's atheism as feminine because of Surin's attraction towards those female aspects of erotic motherhood. This passage from Kristeva is a discussion of the experience of another mystic, Angela of Foligno, who suffered because of the distance between her and God. Surin's atheism arises out of this distance he calls damnation, which he exemplifies by turning also to Angela. Kristeva sees Angela as a melancholic who is "suspicious" of the possibility of using language, the "powers of the Word" to bridge the divide between God's presence and the soul. Surin finds in the authority of the "Blessed Angela" a refusal to fall into the temptation of depressive atheism by accepting the loss in damnation as part of the relationship with God. As he quotes her: "If he wishes to damn me, may he damn me immediately" (Surin, 1963, p. 306). Angela's, and Surin's, love for

God is so intense that they are willing to give up God and be damned for the sake of God. The pain of the absence of the object of desire is a price to pay for the joy brought about when that object was present.

Surin knew that love requires sacrifice, having to go through despair on behalf of another. He claims that in order to bridge the divine-human divide that Kristeva mentions, the soul must go through purgatory and hell before encountering the divine bridegroom in spiritual marriage (Surin, 1963, p. 297). Love of human beings can require just as much. In Surin's life the loss of Christ followed immediately upon the threat of the loss of Jeanne des Anges' soul. Her spiritual death was a possibility that he could not tolerate. Kristeva believes that it is such a threat that can lead to mystical ecstasy: "In the place of death and so as not to die of the other's death, I bring forth – or at least I rate highly – an artifice, an ideal, a 'beyond' that my psyche produces in order to take up a position outside itself – ek-stasis" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 99). She proposes understanding the melancholic individual as creating a loved other, divine or imagined, in order to escape having to die of the despair caused by the loss of a loved one. But we saw that Surin extends Kristeva by pushing further the individual "I" into a relation with another, into a "we" that is not produced by the psyche. His relation with a damning Christ may have been an artifice created by the fear of loss; but the ecstasy of his subjective encounter with Christ becomes nevertheless real when it is directed towards inter-subjective relations with others, as he himself believed it did. Surin emphasizes: "It is necessary to point out again that all these forces that come to the soul from love, lead particularly to charity for the neighbor" (Surin, 1990, p. 291). This imperative does not cease during ecstasy since "during these operations of grace he felt a singular instinct of love for souls" (Surin, 1990, p.290). He was ready to "die of the other's death." He accepted with equanimity that he would have to go through hell for Jeanne des Anges. But after his damning experience the possibility of peace returning still remains. In his case melancholia disappeared and the ecstatic joy of love was his again.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For historical documents describing the events prior to Surin's arrival see de Certeau (2000). After writing the article, my attention was drawn to a study of demonic possession in early modern France up to, but not including, the events at Loudun. See Ferber (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Aside from de Certeau's works, scholarship on Surin is scant. De Certeau's main work on Surin, his doctoral thesis, has not been published. For a linguistic approach to some of the issues I am discussing here see de Certeau (1986, pp. 91-93, 101-15). I am aware of only two other studies, both Christian theological. See Breton (1985) and Myle (1979).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the social and political aspects see de Certeau (2000).

<sup>4</sup> For an account of her influence in seventeenth century France see de Certeau (1992).

<sup>5</sup> In his texts, especially his *Guide*, Surin uses as authoritative sources not only patristic ones but also women's mystical writings. Among the women most often mentioned, besides Teresa of Avila, we find Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Genoa, Gertrude of Helfta, and Magdalene de Pazzi.

<sup>6</sup> As Kristeva tells us, "[my research] is very much based on my personal development, on my biography, and on the historical processes that I have lived through, whether these be intellectual movements...or my own experience of maternity" (quoted in Maragrone & Lechte, 2004, p.144). Discussing her own post-partum depression, Kristeva writes: "Discovering autonomy and authority allows you to work with your own suffering and to grant it a discourse – not in an autoerotic or self-enclosed way, but in a way that enables you to connect with other people" (1996, p.10).

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