The rich symbolism of the fleur-de-lis can be traced back at least as far as the Song of Solomon 2.2: *sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias* (“As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters”). As an iconographical attribute of the Virgin Mary, the white lily symbolizes purity and chastity. The adoption of the fleur-de-lis as the heraldic symbol of the French monarchy as early as the fifth century by King Clovis I further endowed this motif with sublime connotations. The brief and troubled life of Marie Louise de Orléans (1662–1689), queen consort of Spain from 1679 to 1689, may be appropriately emblematized as that of a lily among thorns. In this chapter, we will situate the ill-fated queen within her cultural and historical contexts and examine how some aspects of her life can be interpreted emblematically through the hieroglyphs that decorated the convent walls for the official Madrid celebration of her funeral exequies, and which appeared subsequently in print form in the published chronicle of these solemn celebrations. At least some of these hieroglyphs fulfill their customary function as the exalted remembrance of the passing of a monarch but at the same time reveal a subversive subtext that decries the sterility that has left a nation bereft of a successor.

The decline of Spain and the end of its Golden Age coincided fully with the sterile and impotent reign of Marie’s husband, Carlos II,
el hechizado (the bewitched), and the last gasp of the Hapsburg era. Of course, the impoverishment of Spain was already well entrenched by the time Carlos II ascended to the throne. In the final years of the reign of his father, Felipe IV, the country was virtually penniless: “Many of the nobility had been rendered bankrupt by demands for contributions and the once powerful hidalgo caste had been reduced by service in the wars, emigration, celibacy and profligacy.” What is more, Spain had already begun to relinquish its foreign possessions under Felipe. But it was on the watch of Carlos II that Spain lost Portugal in 1668, a watershed event that presaged things to come. Although the splendorous façade of life at court still gave the appearance of Spain as a proud and fearless defender of the faith, a glance behind the gilded exterior revealed the festering wounds of moral, political, and financial ruin. Spain was a country that produced little and consumed to excess. Its moral bankruptcy can be measured by the inordinate number of brothels that populated the great cities at the end of the seventeenth century: some 3,000 prostitutes plied their trade in Seville in the mid-seventeenth century while at least 80 legally licensed brothels operated in Madrid during the reign of Carlos II.

Perhaps the most emblematic event of the monarch’s regency was the massive Auto de Fe over which Carlos presided in 1680, along with his first wife and mother. This was the largest tribunal of its kind the Spanish Inquisition had ever convened. In this highly orchestrated theater of the macabre, some 120 poor souls were put on trial, and 21 of these were consigned to the flames. The whole sordid scene was immortalized in Francisco Rizi’s brilliant 1683 painting, Auto de fe en la Plaza Mayor.

It was in fact right around the time of this great Auto de Fe that Spain fell into almost total ruin. The austerity measures implemented by the new prime minister Juan Tomás de la Cerda, the Duke of Medinaceli, though fiscally sound, were met with suspicion and resistance. The devaluation of Spanish coinage that went into effect in 1680, necessitated by the substitution of copper (vellón) for silver, had disastrous consequences for the economy. In the words of the French envoy, the Marquis de Villars, “it would be difficult to describe to its full extent the disorder in the government of Spain,” or, for that matter, the misery to which Castile had been reduced. Aversion toward manual labor and the aspiration for nobility, with all the privileges that it entailed, such as freedom from certain taxes and a life of indolent self-indulgence, led to an almost total stagnation of...