

The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World

(Formerly Medieval Iberian Peninsula)

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Between Desire and Passion

Teresa de Cartagena

By

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empowered herself with her tears as signs of her visionary experience, Teresa empowered herself with her deafness as a sign of God's gift. Both could appropriate the words of the Gospels to claim that their discourse was in accordance with the Holy Church. Teresa de Cartagena represents one of the few female writers who could resist the Inquisition and her detractors in order to perpetuate her manuscript through her use of traditional rhetorical devices.

CHAPTER FIVE

WRITING TO GIVE VOICE: DEFENSE OF WOMEN

The second treatise of Teresa de Cartagena (ca. 1425–?), *Admiración operum Dey* (ca. 1477), represents the first Castilian work written by a female author arguing in defense of women. Curiously enough, as Deyermond noted, *Admiración* has not received the attention that it should have. Instead, critics have emphasized the conventional arguments found in *Arboleda*.¹ It seems that scholars are very cautious and skeptical in relating modern feminist thought to medieval works. However, there are some recent studies that consider the differences in time, social context, and history that surround medieval texts and allow us to reevaluate them. I will argue that Teresa contributes to the development of an early feminist discourse and participated in the *querelle des femmes*.

In Western culture, the history of the role and images of women was (and still is) of a constant effort to neutralize and renounce female power. Nonetheless, the images used against women can also be subverted in their defense. Teresa does this when she reapplies the same rhetorical apparatuses that the Christian tradition provided her with to ironically criticize contemporary male intellectuals. Teresa scrutinizes the traditional reflections of women that men project. This scrutiny goes beyond self-reflection and examines social projections of female gender roles and expectations. Such a conscientious reflection empowers Teresa to challenge the relationship of power between men and women. Her writings open up possibilities for women to achieve self-imagination and self-projection, which is a unique way to overcome the patriarchal power of the male projection. The essential step in self-realization and self-empowerment will lead to re-conceptualize women's own social gender identity. Re-defining women's own gender roles in a socio-cultural context diametrically challenges men's phallogocentric thinking, while allowing women to see and look at their own selves.²

¹ Alan Deyermond, "Las autoras medievales castellanas a la luz de las últimas investigaciones," *Medioevo y Literatura: Actas del V Congreso de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval* 1 (1995): 44.

² Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes, 1400–1789*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8, no. 1 (1982): 4–8.

As we have pointed out in previous chapters, women's sexuality, virtue, and voice were rejected and, instead, idealized images of women were preferred. But certain women writers, like Teresa de Cartagena in *Admiración*, dared to challenge the rhetorical tradition and question the master narrative, which James Berlin called "the one, true, holy catholic, and apostolic rhetoric."³ This male rhetorical institution was also supported from Plato and Aristotle down to Augustine. Notwithstanding, prominent women figures such as Dhuoda, Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Kempe, Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, Teresa de Cartagena, and Teresa of Avila, among others, practiced self-reflection concerning established, phallogocentric society. These influential women could pose a threat to men:

The spiritual autonomy of such women may have been deeply frightening to patrician men. The device of simultaneously distancing women and informing them of the role within the community that men preferred them to play made images of women attractive to men. For men, the totally visualized and spiritualized—silent and bodiless—woman was manageable.⁴

For men, it is convenient to manage a "silent and bodiless" woman, which equates to the image phallogocentric society has attempted to project and maintain for women throughout history. Monolithic historical narratives conspicuously excluded "women, subordinate classes, and other subaltern groups,"⁵ whereas women—in particular the aforementioned women writers—attempted to incorporate and revalorize themselves in the narrations of their marginalization and suffering, at times by using irony and the subversion of traditional male discourses. This chapter will concentrate on the literary tradition and the context of how women intellectuals rendered self-representation and self-defense in the Middle Ages.

1. *Women's Defense in Medieval Europe*

Medieval women were framed within the stereotypes of misogynist social discourses. In the *Summa Theologica*, a work that would greatly influence generations of religious philosophers and theologians, Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274) followed Aristotle's concept of gender, which understood

³ James Berlin, "Revisionary Histories of Rhetoric," in *Writing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Victor J. Vitanza (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 112–13.

⁴ Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 83–84.

⁵ Berlin, "Revisionary Histories of Rhetoric," 112–13.

women as biologically "accidental." In the natural order, the male seed always intends to produce another male. Females are only created due to a weakness in the male seed or in the female material or due to external factors, such as the atmosphere. In addition, as with Aristotle, Aquinas considered women to be physically and intellectually inferior to men: "Woman is naturally subject to man because in man the discretion of reason predominates" (96.3).⁶ Males were naturally more adept in "intellectual operation"⁷ than females.⁸ For centuries, this view of women as inferior to men would have a profound impact on Western society. It led to contextualizing women in the religious dichotomy of either gateways to God or the Devil.⁹

While the medieval intellectuals of the Church and of other male-dominant institutions subscribed to such conceptualizations of feminine inferiority in the name of philosophy and theology, in daily, secular life they sought to formulate new roles for women during the rise of the vernacular in literature, which started in Western Europe in the twelfth century.¹⁰ One of the main reasons for the rise was the shift from a heroic culture—courtly knight and courtly lady—to a courtly culture, which stressed courtly love.¹¹ The audience for the early vernacular narratives of courtly love consisted of women—the queen, duchess, and all the other ladies of her court. In order to please this audience, poets writing in the vernacular gave women central and more active roles. The heroic plots of men fighting and bonding with each other found in epic poetry evolved

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I 92.1.2.

⁷ Ibid. 92.1.

⁸ Cynthia Russett, "All About Eve: What Men Have Thought about Women Thinking," *The American Scholar* 74, no. 2 (2005): 43.

⁹ See Howard R. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). See Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰ June Hall McCash, "The Role of Women in the Rise of the Vernacular," *Comparative Literature* 60, no. 1 (2008): 45.

¹¹ Before the development of courtly love literature, the most significant Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf* (dated between the 8th and 11th century), the *Chanson de Roland* (between 1140–1170) in France, and *El Cantar de Myo Cid* (1207) in Spain, centered exclusively on the exploits of male heroes. See Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (1991; repr., Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2000); C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985); E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). For cultural changes in Europe see Wallace K. Ferguson, *Europe in Transition, 1300–1520* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

into plots that stressed how noble knights were motivated by their devoted love to an ideal lady.¹² In this sense, the growth of the vernacular language helped to empower women in the written world.¹³ Women began employing the common vernacular for personal expression. In the fourteenth century, Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438) wrote the first autobiography in the English language and Leonor López de Córdoba (ca. 1362–1420) did the same for the Castilian language. Certainly, without the rise of vernacular languages, we would not have any mystical works by female writers. In the religious environment, since women lacked the authority to preach and preside in the Church, some formed sects that attracted women followers. Feminine forms of religious and mystical practice can be discerned by the thirteenth century, concomitant with the rise of vernacular language.¹⁴ The major women writers of the Middle Ages relied upon their male confessors and male scribes to advance and approve of their unorthodox form of religious practice. Nevertheless, these women remained loyal to the institutions of the Church and were theologically orthodox. It was heretical groups, such as the Italian Guglielmites, that presented what in modern terms can be considered “feminist” alternatives to orthodox religious thought.

The followers of the heretic St. Guglielma of Milan (d. 1282) believed her to be the female incarnation of the Holy Spirit and expected her to establish a new Church with a female Pope and cardinals.¹⁵ She had

¹² For McCash, the best example of these changes in the female role in literature is the work by Wace, the *Roman de Brut* (1155), an Arthurian text written in the vernacular. Hall McCash, “The Role of Women,” 45.

¹³ Andrea J. Dickens, *The Female Mystic. Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Tauris, 2009), 4.

¹⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 172.

¹⁵ Barbara Newman explains that Guglielma became a mysterious and powerful figure in her lifetime, attracting many different projections onto her from others. Her origins are unknown, but she arrived in Milan around 1260. She was apparently a widow and took on the life of a “pinzochera,” a religious woman who lived independently in her home. Here teachings were simple yet charismatic, and she quickly attracted women and men as disciples, due to her reputation as a healer. A close-knit group emerged and expressed fierce allegiance to Guglielma and to each other. The constant rumors that she was the daughter of the King of Bohemia only helped to increase her claims to sanctity and prevent her from being burned at the stake. When she died on August 24, 1281, she was the center of a loyal religious *famiglia*. She was buried in the Cistercian Abbey of Chiaravalle and instantly became the object of a St. cult. The activities of her apostles later came to the attention of the Inquisition in Milan. In 1330, at least thirty-three apostles of Guglielma were interrogated, three of whom were sentenced to death. Based on a confession most likely obtained through torture, Guglielma was condemned by the Church. Her tomb, images, and the writings of her disciples were destroyed in the hopes that there would remain no trace of her. Barbara Newman, “The Heretic Saint: Guglielma of Bohemia, Milan, and Brunate,” *Church History* 74 (2005): 1–3. See also Steven Wessley “The Thirteenth-Century

many followers because she composed her accounts in the vernacular. Some heretical works by women, such as Marguerite Porete's (d. 1310) *Mirouer des simples ames* (*Mirror of Simple Souls*)¹⁶—considered the oldest extant mystical work in French¹⁷—have survived until today, even though Marguerite was put on trial and burned by the Inquisition in Paris. Marguerite did not reside in a cloistered convent, so her ideas could be spread freely, hence, reaching the Inquisition. This work was circulated and translated into different languages in spite of the fact that the Church regarded it as apostate. Another popular heretical testimony resembling Marguerite's was written by Na Prous Boneta (d. 1325) from the south of France. As a follower of the Spiritual Franciscans, she preached about apostolic poverty. She particularly insisted on the belief that the gospels revealed that Christ had possessed nothing on earth. Based on this conviction, she denounced the Church for having lost its mission, for which reason it should no longer enjoy authority. This doctrine was one of the most controversial ones during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and in the beginning was accepted, though with moderation, in Franciscan sermons. But in 1317, it was declared heretical and, as a consequence, persecution started, including the punishment of death for Na Prous in 1325.¹⁸

When women stood out through their actions and when their way of thinking held a certain influence in society, they became considered either heretics or saints. The former could end up burned at the stake, while the latter constantly needed to demonstrate that they were not heretics. In the thirteenth century, declared saints of the period were frequently associated with the new religious orders of St. Francis and Saint Clare, who promoted new forms of extremely ascetic devotion to demonstrate their sanctity. One could encounter signs of Christ literally written on bodies, as in the case of Saint Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) and Christina Mirabilis (1150–1224). Without a doubt, the extreme and pathological acts carried out by these women demonstrated to their society the grace of divine power.¹⁹ Aside from these practices, a number of women assured their entrance into paradise through community charity work

Guglielmites: Salvation Through Women,” in *Medieval Women*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 289–300.

¹⁶ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, eds. Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, and J. C. Marler (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

¹⁷ McCash, “The Role of Women,” 46.

¹⁸ Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 284–90.

¹⁹ See my analysis of women's discourses in chapter II. See also Bynum, *Fragmentation*, 101–2.

and devotion through prayers, but such everyday actions were not given much importance at the time. In order to vindicate the female subject as a model of Christian purity, the same Church demanded exclusively female signs of expression:

Because preachers, confessors and spiritual directors assumed the person to be a psychosomatic unity, they not only read unusual bodily events as expressions of soul but also expected body itself to offer a means of access to the divine. Because they worshiped a God who became incarnate and died for the sins of others, they viewed all bodily events—the hideous wounds of martyrs or stigmatics as well as the rosy-faced beauty of virgins—as possible manifestations of grace. Because they associated the female with the fleshly, they expected somatic expressions to characterize women's spirituality.²⁰

Throughout this time period, a considerable amount of mystical writings by women appeared in various parts of Europe. To name a few of these writers, there were, in Germany, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Elisabeth of Schönau (1129–1165), in France, Marie de France (siglo XII), in Italy, Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), and in England, Margery Kempe (ca.1373–1438).²¹ Some of their works were written first in Latin and then translated into the vernacular or vice versa. Ironically, if their works had not been preserved in Latin, they might have eventually disappeared. Writing in the vernacular increased local readership, but it prevented a wider audience. In these texts, there is a struggle with language and with expressing the inexplicable, something that could lead to *l'écriture féminine*, “the emergence of a new linguistic order composed of words, laughter, tears, sleep, and dreams.”²² At the same time, these women needed to assure their belief in Christ and the Church and their submissive position in the society.

1.1. *Early Women's Defense*

The term “feminism” may seem to be anachronistic for the Middle Ages, since it refers to a modern concept. Nevertheless, I would like to employ it in a broad sense by including medieval women's defense of women. Scholars often use terms such as pro-woman, proto-feminine,

²⁰ Bynum, *Fragmentation*, 235.

²¹ See chapter IV for more detailed examples.

²² D. Régnier-Bohler, “Literary and Mystical Voices,” in *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Klapish-Zuber, vol. 2 of *A History of Women in the West* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 467.

or proto-feminist to designate these types of medieval women in order to avoid the word “feminism.” For Joan Kelly, there existed an early feminist theory, even though it lacked a perspective of social movement's ability to change events.²³ Kelly argues that the lack of a women's movement meant that the feminists of the *querelle des femmes* did not have the option of action. Yet, this did not imply that they could not be influential. Noting a decline in the position of women in society, these women wrote to correct it, and, in doing so, created new ideas as well as the first feminist theory, that is to say, a “conceptual vision” where a stance was taken and ideas developed. Kelly delineates three main propositions held by these thinkers:

1. The defenses of women that belong to the *querelle* and the educational writings related to them are almost all polemical. In these writings, women took a conscious stand in opposition to male defamation and mistreatment of women. Their ideas arose as a dialectical opposition to misogyny.
2. In their opposition, the early feminists focused on what we would now call gender. That is, they had a sure sense that the sexes are culturally, and not just biologically, formed. Women were a social group, in the view of early feminists. They directed their ideas against the notions of a defective sex that flowed from the misogynous side of the debate and against the societal shaping of women to fit those notions.
3. Their understanding of misogyny and gender led many feminists to a universalist outlook that transcended the accepted value systems of the time. Feminist of the *querelle* appreciated how their opponents' misogyny reflected the social position of their male authors. By exposing ideology and opposing the prejudice and narrowness it fostered, they stood for a truly general conception of humanity.²⁴

A conscious, oppositional stance took aim at the misogyny of male writers. Texts were written against the notion of women being the defective sex and against the pressure society placed on women to fit this conception. The early feminists apprehended that the misogyny expressed by male authors reflected those authors' position in society. The women, thus, argued against an ideology and its social practice, insisting instead on a general notion of humanity. But Christianity, at the same time,

²³ Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory,” 4–28. For French feminism theory, see Léon Abensour, *Histoire générale du féminisme* (1921; repr., Geneva: Slatkine, Reprints, 1979), and *La Femme et le féminisme avant la révolution* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1923); Lula McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance: From Christine of Pisa [sic] to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929).

²⁴ Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory,” 6–7.

thought women could also attain salvation and sainthood, just as men could. Certain women (and men) from the upper level of society enjoyed privileges and could benefit from the new ideas of *humanitas*, where “education as cultivating the human in man, was not meant for ‘man’ male and female anymore than were the occupations of the literati.”²⁵ In this contradictory context emerged a new consciousness concerning women, something that Kelly views as both modern and feminist.

French feminists consider the humanist, Christine de Pizan (1364–1430),²⁶ the first writer who grasped modern feminist thinking. She is also regarded by many to have been the “first professional writer” for her famous theoretical work, *Le livre de la cité des dames* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*) (1405).²⁷ For Erich Köhler, Christine also represents the first feminist for having written about her experience from the perspective of a female body against the discourse of the male scholars of the time.

²⁵ Ibid., 8. See Margaret King, “Thwarted Ambitions: Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59 (1976): 280–304; “The Religious Retreat of Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466): Sexism and Its Consequences in the Fifteenth Century,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 4 (1978): 807–22; and “Book Lined Cells,” in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women on the European Past*, ed. Patricia Labalme (New York and London: New York University Press, 1980), 66–90.

²⁶ See Susan Groag Bell, “Christine de Pizan: Humanism and the Problems of a Studious Woman,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 173–84. See also Rose Rigaud, *Les Idées féministes de Christine de Pisan* (Neuchâtel: Attinger Freres, 1911).

²⁷ Sarah Hanley has argued that Christine may have been motivated to defend her sex because her work represented only the opening phase in the debate about the role of women in government, since her work “launched a full-scale public challenge to writers currently maneuvering to exclude women from political rule by resort to defamation” Sarah Hanley, “Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil,” in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 86. Hanley further argues that Jean de Montreuil considered Christine’s book to be a challenge. Accordingly, he sought to exclude women from government, not in mere defamation, but rather through Salic Law in order to give this exclusion a legal basis. Sarah Hanley, “The Politics of Identity and Monarchic Government in France: The Debate over Female Exclusion,” in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 289–304. Craig Taylor has also pointed out that the ascent of Christine’s patrons, the Valois, was only possible because it barred women from succession. Craig Taylor, “The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages,” *French Historical Studies* 29 (2006): 546. But, as Taylor argues, Jean did not turn to Salic law to give a legal basis for misogyny. Because of the prominence of Queen Isabeau of Bavaria in the occasions that King Charles VII was indisposed due to madness, this would have been an awkward stance to take. The Salic Law should instead be viewed as a “new authority” that replaced previous misogynist discourse. Taylor, “Salic Law, French Queenship,” 558. See Tracy Adams, who explains that Christine uses female exclusion from succession to the throne to bolster her argument for female regency. Tracy Adams, “Christine de Pizan, Isabeau of Bavaria, and Female Regency,” *French Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (2009): 1–32.

She recognized that the evils attributed to women had social causes and did not stem from some natural, intrinsic characteristic of women.²⁸ *Le livre de la cité des dames*, which transgresses the taboos of the period, appropriates language for the first time in order to defend women from the continuous invectives of the misogynist society. And she does this by speaking of her own experience. Nonetheless, since Christine’s work encompasses various fields of study, including history, poetry, politics, and theology, modern scholars have overlooked the theological arguments in her defense of women and her appeals for social justice, instead viewing her as principally a secular writer. Thus I believe that, although Christine was not a nun, as Bonnie Birk has noted, she is an exceptional model of a medieval woman writer, who defends women within the context of feminist theology and biblical criticism.²⁹ Christine’s writings demonstrate that there is no difference in gender, and therefore men and women are ontologically equal.³⁰

Christine de Pizan’s work centers on the representation of woman over more than three centuries. It defends against the severe offenses directed by the misogynist Jean de Meun (ca. 1240–ca. 1305) in his *Roman de la Rose* that initiates the *querelle des femmes*.³¹ Then, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), in his work, *Corbaccio* (ca. 1355),³² promotes and intensifies this anti-feminist ideology in all of Europe. This debate over the dignity and honor of women, between writers both male and female, would expand into the following century. Teresa did not mention who her critics were, but she protested against her male detractors. For this reason, we can say that, like Christine, she was engaged in the debate about women’s dignity and honor.

In *Le livre de la cité des dames* Christine presents an allegorical society, where the word “lady” refers to a woman of noble spirit, instead of noble birth. Christine begins her story by reading from Matheolus’s *Lamentations*, a work from thirteenth century. Upon reading this work, Christine laments

²⁸ Erich Köhler, *La aventura caballeresca: Ideal y realidad en la narrativa Cortés*, trans. Blanca Garí (Barcelona: Sirmio, 1991), 55.

²⁹ See Bonnie A. Birk, *Christine de Pizan and Biblical Wisdom: a Feminist-Theological Point of View* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Birk, *Christine de Pizan and Biblical Wisdom*, 21.

³¹ Rosalind Brown-Grant, “The ‘querelle de la Rose’: Christine’s critique of misogynist doctrine and literary practice,” in *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women. Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7–51.

³² Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Corbaccio*, ed. and trans. Cassell (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

that God had made her with a female body: "This thought inspired such a great sense of disgust and sadness in me that I began to despise myself and the whole of my sex as an aberration in nature."³³ In her lament, she appeals to three allegorical figures that present themselves to her: Lady Reason, Rectitude, and Justice—three lay virtues corresponding to the three Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. In order to rehabilitate women, the author constructs a city. Lady Reason helps Christine build the external walls of the city and answers her questions concerning why men slander women. Lady Reason guides Christine to use the spade of her intelligence to dig a trench around the city, while Lady Reason will carry the hods of earth away on her shoulders. These "hods of earth" represent the beliefs Christine had about the misogynist writings against women. Through her readings of moral works composed by learned men of great intelligence, Christine came to believe that women must be bad.³⁴ Christine was not using reason in her learning; it is Lady Reason who guides her to do away with her negative thoughts about women and think of the women of merit who accomplished great deeds in the past. Christine thus employs the allegory of Lady Reason to teach herself and her readers about reason. She provides a different concept of woman to her audience that overturns the misogynist portrayal presented by male writers. Teresa also used allegorical images in her treatises to subvert the ideology of the misogynist society. She changed the meaning of the traditional discourses in order to provide a (different) voice to women.

Christine describes numerous brave female warriors, such as Semiramis and Penthesilea; wise and beneficial women, like Circe, Sappho, and Judith; chaste women, like Sarah and Rebecca; saints, like Marie Magdalene, Lucia, and even the Virgin Mary; passionate wives, like Artemisa and Agripina, to offer a history of women and an indictment in their defense. This defense becomes clear when the author investigates one of the primary sources of the lives of these protagonists—Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, a work that, while exhorting women's virtue, stereotypes them as inferior. Another source was Saint Augustine's *The City of God*, whose author "la construye en cierta forma para defender a los cristianos de las acusaciones de haber acabado con el imperio romano, aparte de recordar la idea grecorromana de ciudad como entidad política unitaria."³⁵

³³ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin, 2000), 6–7.

³⁴ Pizan, *City of Ladies*, 7.

³⁵ Erich Köhler, *La aventura caballeresca*, 77.

Köhler declares that Christine is the first writer who definitively differentiated a space for women. Indeed, he stresses that the place itself in which Christine's work transpires symbolizes the first step in the conquest of females' own space in a society that begins to value privacy. "Es 'La habitación propia' reclamada por Virginia Woolf 'avant la lettre!'"³⁶

Christine de Pizan's life experiences strongly influenced her understanding of life itself and shaped her as a woman writer. She suffered many misfortunes in life. In 1389, two years after the death of her father, she lost her husband and newly-born child to the plague, leaving her a widow at the age of twenty-five, with three children and no economic assistance. The severe torment that she endured became a reason for her to write. In addition, she represents the suffering of the female body for having received and survived the continual intellectual criticisms of men about women, something that never allowed her to live in harmony with society.³⁷ Society had constantly imposed on her the dichotomy of the inferiority of women versus the superiority of men. She insists that the souls of men and women were created equal and do not differ if they reside in a male or female body. Men and women are not different species, since both share one human nature. Fortunately, Christine did not pursue this endeavor on her own. Other women around Europe survived the misogynist society and revealed their silenced voice. We may incorporate Teresa de Cartagena in this rank of women writers who fought for their right to pick up the pen. Teresa was the first Castilian female author who illustrates her marginalization from society for having been a *conversa* nun, a woman writer, and a deaf person. To better understand Teresa's unique case, we will contextualize her by discussing other women writers in medieval Spain.

2. Spanish Women Writers in the Early Modern Age

In European countries, such as Italy, France, England, and Germany, numerous women wrote mystic texts that express their authors' experience and connection with God. Unlike these women visionaries, medieval Spanish women writers composed works not based on mystic events or mystic understandings of their lives but that were deeply rooted in their own awareness of being authors. This is to say, the visionaries wrote

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁷ Pizan, *City of Ladies*, xvi–xxxv.

because they felt empowered since God spoke through them and He revealed his grandeur. For this reason their words acquired value, not because of the author's own individuality. In a certain way, the visionaries lose their authority and authorship by transferring all authorial power to God; though, at the same time, the works they produce gain authority. Spanish women writers immerse themselves in religious discourse, following traditional rites, such as *imitatio Christi*, the Eucharist, *Christus medicus*, etc. Mystic writings arrive late in Spain, not until the Renaissance, with St. Teresa of Avila's works. Prior to St. Teresa, most of Spanish women writers, while conscious of the need to grant authority to their writings, attempted do so by emblematically participating in traditional religious discourses, not by invoking their direct experience with God. This allows them to speak in the first person (not as intermediaries of God's voice) and gain a sense of authorship. Nevertheless, women writers, whether visionary, religious, or secular, all faced the same scrupulous judgment of their misogynist society.

Unlike in other European countries, where the debate about women began already in the thirteenth century, on the Iberian Peninsula, distinguished female writers emerged only in the first half of the fifteenth century. Manuel Serrano y Sanz, in his collection, *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas*, reveals the existence of a large quantity of women (more than a few hundred) who wrote during the early Modern Age. Almost half of these writings were by nuns who, in general, wrote to share their experiences, instruct others in their convent, or satisfy the request of ecclesiastic authorities interested in examining their religious integrity. Medieval women in Spain, as well as their counterparts in other parts of Europe, lived exiled in the world of orality, and the task of writing remained out of their reach due to their nature. Thus, the fact that a woman might take up the pen or dictate her words to a notary (which was the same as if she had written in her own hand) constituted an exceptional case. Ronald Surtz points out the following:

Literacy simply meant possessing the skills necessary for producing texts. For women, however, actually writing or dictating texts meant overcoming severe psychological barriers to written expression. Saint Paul's injunction that women keep silent (I Corinthians 14–34) was extrapolated to include writing. Indeed, writing was viewed as a more serious infraction than speaking because of its obvious public dimension—manuscripts were circulated—and because writing was considered a task appropriate only to the male gender. Even when it was thought advisable that women learn to read and write, female writing was never intended to leave the private

sphere of the home or the convent, for the public world of men was off-limits to the writings of women.³⁸

Perhaps at the moment of writing, Spanish women writers did not intend to trespass the private sphere. Nonetheless, in spite of the rigid and intolerant socio-cultural structure, certain women managed to transgress into the public sphere. Among the writings that have come down to us are works by Leonor López de Córdoba, Constanza de Castilla, Teresa de Cartagena, and Isabel de Villena, who all came before the illustrious Teresa of Avila. These four women all belonged to a privileged class. Not only did they have power because of their nobility, but they also had received education in a very auspicious ambience. However, all these women experienced anguish in their lives and they expressed their afflictions and sorrows in their writings with varying degrees of intensity. Without question, in the discourse of these women, Christ represents the model for a religious life that imitates His passion, suffering, and death. These traditional discourses were used in addition to those of exemplary female figures from the Holy Scripture and, on occasion, that of the devotion to the Virgin Mary, whose presence had already begun to decline in religious texts of the fifteenth century. According to Deyermond, in the case of Spain, devotion to Christ was disseminated more starting in the mid-fifteenth century. Earlier, devotion to Mary and hagiography were more common; these had been the favorite themes of Spanish religious narratives.³⁹

As we have seen, in the fourteenth century, Margery Kempe composed the first autobiography in the English language, while Leonor López de Córdoba (ca. 1362–1420) wrote the first in Castilian, entitled, *Memoorias* (*Memoirs*) (ca. 1412)—though this work is not extensive in length, comprising of only nine pages.⁴⁰ Leonor was originally born in Calatayud of the kingdom of Aragon and lived most of her life in Córdoba. It is only recently that the remarkable nature of Leonor López de Córdoba's work has been appreciated, since she had been maligned in her time, as well as by later critics. She seeks “to create a feminine space by focusing on what Louise Mirrer has described as ‘the personal and private

³⁸ Surtz, *Writing Women*, 5.

³⁹ Alan Deyermond, *A Literary History of Spain: The Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 196. See Angel Gómez Moreno, *Claves hagiográficas de la literatura española (del Cantar del Mio Cid a Cervantes)* (Madrid: Editorial Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2008).

⁴⁰ Deyermond, *Historia y crítica*, 392.

spheres."⁴¹ Leonor López de Córdoba enjoyed the privileges of being a confidant and advisor of Queen Catherine of Lancaster, the wife of Enrique III, el Doliente (Henry III the Infirm). In fact, Leonor López de Córdoba was a key advisor of Catherine's co-regency with her son after the death of Enrique III.⁴² Nonetheless, we have learned from her autobiography that she endured suffering and faced many difficulties during her life.⁴³ In *Memorias*, she exhibits "lo testimonial, lo histórico, lo familiar con lo sentimental, lo particular, lo íntimo, hasta convertir un frío documento notarial en una voluntaria radiografía del propio existir" of a noble woman during the High Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Leonor claims in her work that her aim is to communicate to "todas las criaturas que estuvieren en tribulación sean ciertos, ... que si se encomiendan de corazón a la Virgen Santa María, que Ella las consolará, y acorrerá, como consoló a mí" (all creatures in tribulation that they might be assured ... that if they commend themselves wholeheartedly to the Holy Virgin Mary she will console them and succor them as she consoled me).⁴⁵ Here, the aid of the Virgin is emphasized more in its economical capacity than in the spiritual. Whatever the reasons that may have led her to write her autobiography, her suffering was a perpetual motor in her life. She spent six years in prison as a child, her father was executed, and various members of her family, her children, and servants, died in a consecutive manner. These events tormented her such that they motivated her to vindicate herself and her family for all the events that occurred after her family lost the protection of the crown. This short narrative was written as a legal, notarial document. It begins as an expression of piety, but ends up as a defense of the good name of her family. She defends herself not as an individual, but as a member of her family. Likewise, Leonor does not distinguish between "her own

⁴¹ Louise Mirrer, *Women, Jews, and Muslims in the Texts of Reconquest Castile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 140.

⁴² Queen Catharine became co-regent with Fernando de Antequera of his son, Prince Juan, after King Enrique III died in 1406. When Catherine was ruling, she had always sought the advice of Leonor. But Fernando Antequera was against the power of Leonor, so he arranged a way to banish her from the court and from being the adviser of the Queen. See García de Santa María, *Crónica de Juan II de Castilla*, ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo y Arroquia (Madrid, 1982), 56, 353. See Surtz, *Writing Women*, 42n.

⁴³ Reinaldo Ayerbe-Chaux, "Las *Memorias* de doña Leonor López de Córdoba," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 2, no. 1 (1977): 11–33. See also Clara Estow, "Leonor Lopez de Cordoba: Portrait of a Medieval Courtier," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 5 (1982): 23–46.

⁴⁴ Marimón Llorca, *Prosistas castellanas medievales*, 100–01.

⁴⁵ Kaminsky changed the title *Memorias* (*Memoir*) as *Autobiografía*/*Autobiography*. Leonor López de Córdoba, "*Autobiografía*/*Autobiography*," 21. See Ayerbe-Chaux, "Las *Memorias*," 11–33.

personal suffering and the disgrace her family suffered"⁴⁶ but rather both are part of a whole. Like other women writers who wrote about their personal experiences and their suffering, Leonor went against the accepted norms of her society.⁴⁷ Misogynist society was against women writers and usually suppressed their writings. In *Memorias*, the author did not transgress male society, since she did not defend herself, but rather searched to revindicate her family's honor.

Constanza de Castilla (ca. 1395–1478) was of legitimate royal blood, the daughter of Prince Juan and granddaughter of King Pedro I.⁴⁸ Queen Catherine of Lancaster—also a granddaughter of the assassinated King Pedro I—asked her husband, King Enrique III, to allow her to enter the convent of Santo Domingo el Real in Madrid. Although this meant that she would not achieve power in the secular world, as prioress in the convent, she would lead Santo Domingo to some fifty years of prosperity and splendor. Constanza, having grown up with strong female role models such as Queen Catherine, governed the convent with a sense of "sisterhood" and had various women as close advisors. While holding a position of prioress, she wrote the *Libro de devociones y oficios* (*Book of Devotions*) for herself and the nuns under her supervision.⁴⁹ The first prayer of the book starts by portraying Christ's life and passion and continues for about a third of the book. Constanza, as a spiritual guide of the Dominican nuns, favors the devotion of the humanization of Christ. The objective of this prayer is to address certain virtues and sufferings of Christ in order to achieve a more perfected religious life. Baldrige highlights the intention of this author:

By referring to herself as a "great sinner," Constanza is showing the reader her humility; by referring to the "devotion" and "worthiness" of her implied readers, Constanza is showing her respect for them; by referring to God's ability to make her a participant in the worthiness of others, Constanza is

⁴⁶ Leonor López de Córdoba, "*Autobiografía*/*Autobiography*," in *Water Lilies/Flores del agua: An Anthology of Spanish Women Writers from the Fifteenth through the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Amy K. Kaminsky, (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1996), 19. The few studies that have been done since Surtz have been largely based on his analysis. See Ronald Surtz, "Constanza de Castilla and the Gynaeceum of Compassion," in *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: The Mothers of Saint Teresa de Avila* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 41–67.

⁴⁷ McCash, "The Role of Women," 53.

⁴⁸ Juan B. Sitges, *Las mujeres del rey don Pedro I de Castilla* (Madrid: Sucesores de Rivadeneira, 1910), 408–9.

⁴⁹ Constanza de Castilla, *Book of Devotions/Libro de Devociones y Oficios* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998).

showing His omnipotence and mercy; and by referring to the occasion when the reader would recite the prayer, Constanza simultaneously puts her prayer into the context of the daily devotion and implicitly makes her prayer a part of that devotion.⁵⁰

Constanza frequently enunciates her discourse in the first person, even including her own name, and clearly marks her text with her sexual gender. It is not a simple composition of devotions for use in daily life by the nuns, rather it aims to demonstrate the great authorship and the important power of the author, the “I” of Constanza. What stands out is the tactic she uses of remembering all the different women who had influenced her in her life. She states that she was instructed by powerful women, like the Queen of Castile and Catherine of Lancaster. Another woman Constanza mentions is the Virgin Mary herself, whom she adopts as a model and teacher. Indeed, her work includes translations of the apocryphal letters of Saint Ignatius of Antioch to the Virgin Mary and her reply. Surtz notes that “in a sense Constanza is even authorized to write down her teachings and prayers, for the fact that the Virgin Mary committed her thoughts to paper in the form of a letter provides an important precedent for other women to take up the pen.”⁵¹ The pain and suffering of Christ and the Virgin help her to take up her pen and give testimony to her contemplation of God.

To this list of Spanish medieval women writers can be added the intellectual figure of Teresa de Cartagena (ca. 1425–?), who belonged to a privileged and well-known *converso* family of Burgos: Santa María/Cartagena.⁵² She is the only woman from medieval Iberia that has bequeathed to us two consolatory treatises: *Arboleda* and *Admiración*. The aim of these two works was to “first to give meaning to her misfortune and definition to herself through writing, and later to confront her detractors and defend the divine inspiration for her texts and her life and her own right to write.”⁵³ In spite of the fact that she came from a privileged social class, she suffered under various forms of discrimination and adversities for being a deaf person. The remarkable thing about this nun lies in the fact that as a result of her illness, she was isolated from the female world of orality—songs, sermons, prayers, among other activities

⁵⁰ Baldridge, “Christian Woman,” 109.

⁵¹ Surtz, *Writing Women*, 52.

⁵² See chapter II of this book for a more detailed account of her life and family.

⁵³ Seidenspinner-Núñez, “Preface” in *The Writings of Teresa de Cartagena*, ix.

generally practiced by women—and thus, she moved towards the masculine world of writing.⁵⁴ What Teresa accomplished despite her loss of hearing distinguishes her from all other Spanish medieval women writers. Teresa de Cartagena composed two complete treatises, whereas her predecessors had written guidebooks for prayer and a nine-page autobiography. She was the only thinker of the time who wrote from the experience of three marginalized positions: as a woman, a *conversa*, and a deaf. She also represents the emergence of the first early defense of women on the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁵

The first known woman writer of Valencia was Isabel de Villena (Valencia, 1430–1490), the illegitimate daughter of the writer and translator, Don Enric de Villena, uncle of King Juan II of Castile. Her own name was Elionor Manuel de Villena, which she changed to Isabel when she entered into the convent life at the age of fifteen. She professed and became abbess (between 1463 and 1490) of the convent of the Santísima Trinidad de las Clarisas of Valencia. One of her most noteworthy works focuses on the life of Jesus Christ, *Vita Christi* (1497), which contains copious classical sources and quotations.⁵⁶ She promoted the moral and spiritual reform of her nuns, especially because of the unfavorable situation they found themselves in Valencia during the fifteenth century. Isabel considered life in Valencia depraved because the city lacked spiritual and moral strength despite the fact that it enjoyed substantial prosperity in various social and cultural spheres such as industry, commerce, arts, sciences, and letters. Adherent to the exemplary lives of St. Francis and Saint Clare, Isabel sought to save religious souls through the testimony and model of Christ. She devoted special attention to the figure of the Virgin Mary, along with other biblical women, creating a series of female personifications of purity, humility, and contemplation. Intriguingly, or inspired by the *querelle des femmes*, she took a feminist action when answering the misogyny of *L'espill*—known as *El Libro de les Dones* (*The Book of Ladies*)—, by Jaume Roig (d. 1478), an author whom she may have

⁵⁴ *TC Trans.*, 113.

⁵⁵ See Luis Miguel Vicente García, “La defensa de la mujer como intelectual en Teresa de Cartagena y Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” *Mester* 18, no. 2 (1989): 95–103.

⁵⁶ *Vita Christi* was read by a number of important women of the time, including Queen Isabel the Catholic, who requested the book be published. Isabel de Villena, *Vita Christi*, ed. Ramón Miquel y Planas, 3 vols. (Barcelona: Casa Muquel-Rius, 1916). *Vita Christi*, eds. Josep Almiñana Vallés and Joan Costa Catalá, 2 vols (Valencia: Ajuntament de Valencia, 1992). *Panorama de escritoras españolas*, ed. Cristina Ruiz Guerrero 2 vols. (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 1997).

met since he served as physician in the same convent.⁵⁷ Isabel justified her discourse by evoking Christ's defense of Mary Magdalene, which illustrated the virtue of women and alluded to the virtuous nature of the female sex. According to Isabel's reading of that biblical incident, Christ, reminding us of Mary Magdalene's disposition towards love, teaches us about her propensity to piety and mercy, her spirit of sacrifice, and her defense of the truth.⁵⁸ As Rosanna Cantavella argues, Isabel's work may well be feminist, if we mean a defense of the dignity of woman as an integral element of feminism, even though medieval feminists did not advocate what we associate with that word today, such as political recognition or the rights of women to control their own bodies.⁵⁹

It is beyond the scope of my present study to examine in more detail the works of St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582).⁶⁰ However, in order to further contextualize the significance of Teresa de Cartagena's legacy, I would like to underscore the following aspects of St. Teresa, analogous to the deaf Teresa: she was born in a *converso* family, professed as nun, and was committed to writing. St. Teresa had the privilege of living in the intellectual environment of a family of *conversos*—as was the case for Teresa de Cartagena—which promoted the education of its daughters. Her identity as a religious woman and a member of the Church is expected to follow certain social norms. She wishes, however, to find an identity that lies beyond current authority and classifications.⁶¹ Her wish to give voice to her marginal status as a woman conflicts with other voices in her writings

⁵⁷ Cristina Segura Graíño, *Feminismo y misoginia en la literatura española. Fuentes literarias para la Historia de las Mujeres* (Madrid: Narcea, 2001), 710. See Albert-Guillem Hauf, *D'Eximienis a Sor Isabel de Villena. Aportació a l'estudi de la nostra cultura medieval* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1990). For studies on Jaume Roig see Antònia Carré, "L'Espill de Jaume Roig: bibliografia comentada," *Boletín Bibliográfico de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval* 15 (2001): 383–414; Michael Solomon, *The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain: the Arcipreste de Talavera and the Spill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David Wacks, "Reading Jaume Roig's *Spill* and the *Libro de buen amor* in the Iberian *maqāma* tradition," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 83, no. 5 (2006): 597–616; "Social Change: Misogyny, and the *Maqāma* in Jaume Roig's *Spill*," in *Framing Iberia: Maqāmāt and Frametale Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 194–235.

⁵⁸ Rosanna Cantavella and Lluïsa Parra, eds., "introducció," in *Protagonistes Femenines a la Vita Christi*, (Barcelona: La Sal, 1987), xx–xxi.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁶⁰ See Santa Teresa de Jesús, *Libro de la vida*, ed. Otger Steggink (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1986); *Libro de la Vida*, ed. Dámaso Chicarro. 13th ed. (Madrid: Cátedra, 2004).

⁶¹ Elena Rodríguez-Guridi, "Pasajes para perderse: la problemática de la escritura de Teresa de Avila en el *Libro de la vida*," *Neophilologus* 94 (2010): 453.

that represent the norms placed upon her by society, and it is through this tension that she expresses her sense of alienation.

3. *Men's Debate over Women's Writing*

The *querelle des femmes* began with Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*⁶² and Christine de Pizan's reaction to that work in *Le livre de la cité des dames*.⁶³ This debate then continued in many countries in Europe and influenced the women writers I have discussed above. Some of these works wished to completely denigrate the image of women, while others pursued a change in this pejorative vision. A fundamental question was to establish whether or not woman was a diabolical being, and the pro-woman authors were certain that this was not the case.⁶⁴ According to Jacob Ornstein, feminism in Spain essentially focused on women as a moral entity (i.e. the dichotomy of Eve and Mary),⁶⁵ without giving much importance to their identity as members of medieval society. Ornstein also claims that the feminist debate in the rest of Europe had not influenced Castile.⁶⁶ Other critics, such as Antonio Pérez-Romero, disagree, pointing to numerous works that had participated in the debate. Indeed, the feminist debate even went beyond consideration of the moral, including in Spain:

⁶² Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, 3rd ed., trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). The first 4058 lines are by Guillaume de Lorris, and following lines of 4059–21780 are by Jean de Meun. Katharine Rogers explains part of this historical *querelle*. See Katharine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

⁶³ See David F. Hult, "The *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan, and the *Querelle des Femmes*," in *Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184–94.

⁶⁴ For a study of images of woman as a diabolical being, see John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ "Frente a la mujer inclinada al pecado, encarnación de lo malo, Eva; el Nuevo Testamento nos ofrece la mujer encarnación de lo bueno y portadora de las virtudes positivas, María Con esta visión dicotómica Eva/María, el cristianismo intenta reducir a la mujer a una existencia bipolar" Marimón Llorca, *Prosistas*, 66–67. For details, see the description Marimón Llorca gives about the dual vision that was elaborated by Christianity concerning the condition of women. See also Seidenspinner-Núñez, introduction to *The Writings of Teresa de Cartagena*, 16–21.

⁶⁶ Jacob Ornstein, *Luis de Lucena: "Repetición de amores"* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1954), 10.

[I]t had to do with the material and intellectual exploitation of woman—with women as mere tools of men—and with their liberation from servitude. The feminism that Ornstein considers is the stream that springs from the chivalrous tradition. This variety is dehumanizing and idealistic; it fails to treat women as complete human beings made out of flesh and blood.⁶⁷

Women were a mere tool for men to increase their power and honor. A significant aspect of this debate is the situation in which women writers found themselves when they entered the male realm of writing: “El sujeto que usa el lenguaje se inscribe en un orden simbólico y al hacerlo reproduce especularmente, como ha señalado Derrida, el falocentrismo de la cultura occidental.”⁶⁸ Women writers engage in a discursive practice that places them in the same space as their oppressors. Moreover, since there was no women’s movement at the time, it was taken as a given that men were competent in speaking on women’s behalf.⁶⁹ We should ask ourselves not so much about the misogynist writers—it is clear that they believed in the traditional conceptualizations expressed by Aristotle and Aquinas—rather we should examine further the pro-woman writers who presented an argument of women’s virtue by praising them.

The intention and complexity of some authors fluctuate from one ideological side to the other, but modern critics traditionally classify as pro-woman, Álvaro de Luna’s *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mujeres* (1446), and Martín de Córdoba’s *Jardín de nobles doncellas* (1500)—which, according to Deyermond, “al menos superficialmente, se presenta como una diatriba misógina”⁷⁰—Juan Rodríguez del Padrón’s *Triunfo de las donas* (ca. 1440), Diego de Valera’s *Tratado en defensa de virtuosas mujeres* (siglo XV),⁷¹ and Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* (1584). Among the misogynist or anti-feminists, we can group Luis de Lucena’s *Repetición de amores y arte de ajedrez* (1495), Alfonso Martínez de Toledo’s *Arcipreste de Talavera*, also known as *El Corbacho* (1438), and Fernando de Rojas’s *Celestina* (1449).⁷² Male scholars who wrote in defense of women typically describe certain traditional female virtues. But this is not the reason why we can classify these authors, strictly speaking, as pro-woman or proto-feminist,

⁶⁷ Antonio Pérez-Romero, *The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 63.

⁶⁸ Lola Luna, *Leyendo como una mujer la imagen de la Mujer* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1996), 72–73.

⁶⁹ Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory,” 5.

⁷⁰ Deyermond, *Historia y crítica*, 393.

⁷¹ See Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco, “Autoglosa: Diego de Valera y su *Tratado en defensa de virtuosas mujeres*,” *Romance Philology* 61 (2007): 28.

⁷² Ornstein, *Luis de Lucena*, 14.

who fight against the misogynist, prudent gentlemen: “El asunto es incluso más complejo, pues si hay algún término que pueda caracterizar la sinceridad ideológica de un autor medieval ante la mujer y la erótica, éste es la ambigüedad, por lo que resulta extremadamente difícil encasillarlo a rajatabla entre los misóginos o los profeministas.”⁷³ This ambiguity that Agustín Boyer explains concerning male authors who write about women means that we should re-interpret the works of those authors who claim to present a pro-woman perspective.

In the so-called pro-woman works, various themes are discussed with the didactic aim of teaching women about their honor and virtues. Nevertheless, at the same time that female values are stressed, patriarchal supremacy is reinforced even more. In discussing the view of courtly love as a form of game-playing, Julian Weiss stresses the transformational power men gain when acting as a courtly lover.⁷⁴ Love is a fiction, but in carrying out the role of lover, men acquire the power of self-creation, where they can transform fiction and the pretend into reality, an idea that goes back to Ovid: “feigned love is a vehicle for self-creation—you can become what you pretend, hypocrisy becomes sincerity.”⁷⁵ In a similar way, pro-woman writers do not describe social reality, but rather are playing a game, where male writers can create, from their privileged position in society, a fiction using the various patriarchal discourses available to them. In this way, male writers obtain power and are able to “shape social organization.”⁷⁶ This is true when Juan de Mena, in the preface he wrote for Alvaro de Luna’s *Libro de las virtuosas y claras mujeres*, applauds Luna on behalf of women for his praise of women. But, as Weiss notes, this is admitting that Luna is exercising male domination, just as Mena’s voice in the preface to the book also relies on the lack and silence of woman’s voice.⁷⁷

Álvaro de Luna (ca. 1390–1453) is one of the most important figures of pro-woman literature in the High Middle Ages.⁷⁸ In his book, *Libro de las*

⁷³ Agustín Boyer, “Estudio descriptivo del ‘Libro de las virtuosas e clara mugeres’ de Don Alvaro de Luna: Fuentes, género y ubicación en el debate feminista del siglo XV” (PhD diss., University of California, 1988), 252.

⁷⁴ Julian Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna, Juan de Mena and the Power of Courtly Love,” *MLN* 106 (1991): 241.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 242. For reference on Ovid’s account see *Ars amatoria*, I, lines 613–14, quoted in Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna,” 242n.

⁷⁶ Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna,” 242.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁸ Álvaro de Luna was the constable of Castille, during the ruler of Juan II of Castille. See García de Santa María, *Crónica de Juan II de Castilla*.

claras e virtuosos mujeres (*Book of Virtuous and Illustrious Women*),⁷⁹ he describes his concern over the systematic suppression of virtuous women by the “prudent gentlemen” who were involved in the genre of the so called *viris illustratibus*, as exemplified by Saint Jerome’s *On Illustrious Men*:⁸⁰

No poco marauillando nos de tantos prudentes e santos auctores, que de los fechos e virtudes de los claros varones ayan fecho estendida e complida mençion, entre los quales fueron el bien auenturado geronimo e los dos ysidoros e genmadio obispo de constantinopla e braulio e el sagrado alifonso, arçobispo de la toledana silla, e françisco tetrarco, del qual mas es de marauillar, porque vido el oluido de los otros e fue mas çercano a los nuestros tienpos. Por qual razon la memoria de las virtuosas mugeres e sus claros fechos hayan asi, callando, traspasado aquestos, en los sus libros e tractados, saluo juan bocaçio, que de aquellas algunas cosas tracta.⁸¹

Ironically, the pro-woman Luna credits the well-known misogynist writer, Boccaccio, for drawing attention to female virtues in his *De claris mulieribus* (1355–59).⁸² Luna decided to write a work where the honor of illustrious and virtuous women shines and is defended by him. But he participates in a game of power to establish not only women’s virtue, but

⁷⁹ Juan de Mena (1411–1456), another illustrious Spanish scholar, and royal chronicler of Juan II of Castille, supported Luna’s ideas and wrote the preface of the *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mujeres*.

⁸⁰ Saint Jerome composed *De viris illustribus* (ca. 4th century), which represents the first catalogue of 86 illustrious Christian men of letters. This tradition is continued later by Saint Isidore in his *De viris illustribus*. The oldest codex we have of this work (Montpellier, Ecole de Médecina, MS. H.406) is joined together with the catalogue of his predecessor as well as that of Gennadio and for this reason it is of great importance for ecclesiastical history. H. Koeppler, “*De Viris Illustribus* and Saint Isidore of Seville,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1936): 16. See the edition of Isidore of Seville, *El “De viris illustribus” del Isidoro de Sevilla: estudio y edición crítica*, ed. Carmen Codoñer Merino (Salamanca: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones, 1964).

⁸¹ Álvaro de Luna, *Libro de las claras y virtuosas mugeres por el condestable de Castilla don Álvaro de Luna, Maestre de la Orden de Santiago del Espada*, ed. Manuel Castillo (Madrid: Rafael G. Menor, 1908), 20. See José Manuel Fradejas Rueda, “Manuscritos y ediciones de las *Virtuosas e claras mugeres* de don Álvaro de Luna,” in *The Medieval Mind. Hispanic Studies in Honour of Alan Deyermond*, ed. Ian Macpherson and Ralph Penny (London: Tamesis Books, 1997), 139–52. See new edition by Julio Vélez-Sainz, *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2009).

⁸² Boccaccio defended women’s position by saying, “What can we think except that it was an error of nature to give female sex to a body which had been endowed by God with a magnificent virile spirit?” Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Guido Guarino (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 127; see also xxxvii, 87, 131, 217. See also Julio Vélez-Sainz, “Boccaccio, virtue and poder in the *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mugeres* de Álvaro de Luna,” *La corónica* 33, no. 1 (2002): 107–22. Later in life, Boccaccio expressed his disappointment in love by turning against women and writing a misogynist work, the *Corbaccio*.

also his own virtue and noble blood. As Weiss explains: “This period was characterized by the rise of a powerful landed aristocracy, whose ranks were swelled by the creation of new noble titles, and by families eager to display their social nobility”⁸³ Consequently, while the constable asserts the sovereignty of man over woman, he correspondingly manifests his support of the traditions of male society and Catholic dogma:

E asi non son de culpar, sin amenguar, mas las mugeres que los onbres; non negando, por esto, la exçelencia e reuerencia que las mugeres deuan a los onbres, mayor mente a sus maridos ... aunque las mugeres sean muy virtuosas e de grand exçelencia, e algunas dellas sobrepueen en virtudes a algunos onbres, quanto mas resplandescan en las virtudes, e cortesia, e onestad, e toda buena doctrina, tanto mas deuen auer en reuerencia a los varones; e por esto non se niegan sus loables virtudes, antes se afirman, e muestran ser mas perfectas e conplidas.⁸⁴

While Luna praises virtuous women, the most perfect women were, paradoxically, those who revered and served men. Juan de Mena repeats this form of argumentation by saying that women should express love, because true power is exercised without power or force:

Poder de gran señorío
es obrar con no poder;
ca el poder es ya poderío
don non es más fuerça que ser.⁸⁵

In other words, if there is already an established power, woman should not practice power. But for men, this would mean acting from a position of weakness or passive behavior. That Mena is not aware of this paradox shows how natural it is to view the genders as binary opposites, with men representing power and action and women representing lack of power and passivity.⁸⁶ In this sense, Luna not only supports and believes in the power of phallogocentric society, but he also is reaffirming his own virtues over those of other noblemen. The learned men who participated in the *querelle des femmes* were privileged men of high social status, and Luna is instructing them to embrace women for their weakness and to act sophisticated towards them, since men already hold power.

⁸³ Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna,” 242.

⁸⁴ Alvaro de Luna, *Libro de las claras y virtuosas mugeres por el condestable de Castilla don Álvaro de Luna, Maestre de la Orden de Santiago del Espada*, ed. Manuel Castillo (Madrid: Rafael G. Menor, 1908), 250.

⁸⁵ Juan de Mena, “*Tratado de amor*,” in *Obras completas*, ed. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego (Barcelona: Platena, 1989), 14–17st, quoted in Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna,” 250.

⁸⁶ Weiss, “Alvaro de Luna,” 250.

One can conclude that the so-called pro-woman writers are more pro-man than in favor of woman. This is not to say, however, that they embraced misogynist ideology. Their paternal discourse helps to demonstrate that praising women is an act of male domination and, in doing so, they have "the power to structure thought and shape social organization" by reinforcing the binary gender structure of society. In this case, the inferiority of women is stressed, while the same binary structure of power and submission is reinforced. In the Middle Ages, the male sex was assessed according to its attributes: intellectual, active, rational, self-controlled, and disciplined; woman was evaluated according to her conditions: physical, passive, irrational, emotional, lustful, and undisciplined. When the weak sex transgressed one of these prototypical qualities, circulating freely on the other side of the binary structure, society perceived this as a threat to the equilibrium of the patriarchal system. When woman voices her thoughts, some male writers will reply with misogynist opinions, while others will kindly remind her of her place in society. There were two different ways of reacting to women's writings, but they had the same purpose: to silence woman's voice.

When contextualizing Teresa de Cartagena in her socio-cultural environment, one can intuit that she did in fact participate in the *querelle des femmes*, as we shall see in the following chapter. She does not specifically criticize contemporary male authors or their works, but she does argue that women deserve a place in society. She explains in her second treatise, *Admiración*, that she was criticized by male detractors for writing her previous treatise, *Arboleda*, and therefore defends herself from those detractors. With *Admiración*, Teresa de Cartagena establishes herself as the first known female author from the Iberian Peninsula who, already in the fifteenth century, gives voice to women in defending their right to engage in the act of writing. In her defense of her first work, one can assume that Teresa is participating in the long debate that had been circulating in Europe concerning women. She underscores that the ideology of her society concerning the role of women needed to be reevaluated by recognizing what contemporary male scholars think about the female intellect. She will challenge her male detractors in her second work, especially by making use of irony and subversion in her discourse.

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