

## “ÉL SOLO ME LEYÓ” : GENDERED HERMENEUTICS AND SUBVERSIVE POETICS IN *ADMIRACIÓN OPERUM DEY* OF TERESA DE CARTAGENA

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This paper attempts to recover in part *Admiración operum Dey* of Teresa de Cartagena and to situate her writing within the context of prevailing ideologies of women's sexuality and textual possibilities in 15th-century Spain.<sup>1</sup> Thrice marginalized as an author by her gender, her deafness, and her status as a *conversa*, Teresa wrote two works: *Arboleda de los enfermos*, shortly after 1450, where she discusses the spiritual benefits of illness using her deafness as an autobiographical exemplum, and *Admiración operum Dey*, a defense to counter the incredulity (*admiración*) of her detractors who disputed a woman's right to write and called into question her authorship of *Arboleda*, accusing her of plagiarizing male authorities.<sup>2</sup> To

contextualize Teresa's defense as well as the criticism leveled at her first work by her detractors, we must first attend to the intersection between the ideology of gender in the Middle Ages and medieval literary theory.

In the Middle Ages, the scholastic synthesis of both classical and biblical authorities provided a coherent and systematic statement of

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Española, 16 [Madrid: Real Academia Española]). Studies since then include: Alan Deyermond, " 'El convento de dolencias': The Works of Teresa de Cartagena", 19-29, abridged and slightly reworked in "Spain's First Women Writers", 37-44; Deborah S. Ellis, "The Image of the Home in Early English and Spanish Literature", Chapter 2, and "Unifying Imagery in the Works of Teresa de Cartagena: Home and the Dispossessed"; Ronald E. Surtz, "Image Patterns in Teresa de Cartagena's *Arboleda de los enfermos*", 297-304; Luis Miguel Vicente García, "La defensa de la mujer como intelectual en Teresa de Cartagena y Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz", 95-103; Carmen Marimón Llorca, *Prosistas castellanas medievales*, 102-140; Irene Alejandra Molina, "La *Arboleda de los enfermos* de Teresa de Cartagena: un sermón olvidado"; Gregorio Rodríguez Rivas, "La *Arboleda de los enfermos* de Teresa de Cartagena, literatura ascética en el siglo xv", 117-130; and Dayle Seidenspinner-Núñez, "The Cloisters of My Ears": *The Writings of Teresa de Cartagena*.

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this study was read at the *Colloquium on xvc Literature*, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 25-26 June 1993; my thanks to Alan Deyermond who organized the Colloquium and to those who engaged in the spirited and productive discussion which ensued.

<sup>2</sup> In 1967, Lewis J. Hutton published a scholarly edition of the two works (*Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia*

the pre- and post-lapsarian inferiority of women. In articulating the subordinate ontological status of women, scholastic arguments—most notably in the works of Thomas Aquinas—combined the authoritative traditions of classical philosophical discourse—primarily that of Aristotelian metaphysics and natural science—with the patristic and predominantly Augustinian inheritance which had shaped theological speculation through the 12th century.<sup>3</sup> Aristotle's biological theories asserted that the female child represented a defective human being, a "misbegotten male", the result of an accident to the male sperm which was thought to contain potentially the complete human being and to reproduce the likeness of its origin, another male.<sup>4</sup> Thomas follows Aristotle in his view

that the male is ordered to noble activity and intellectual knowledge, while the female, although possessing a rational soul, was created solely with respect to her sexuality and her body, as an instrument of reproduction for the preservation of the divinely-authored species.

For the scholastics, Aristotle's androcentric biological hierarchy which cast woman as an accident of nature—incomplete and inferior to man—neatly provided a "scientific" basis for the rich antifeminist tradition inherited from the Church Fathers which was ultimately grounded on their exegetical readings of God's creation narrated in Genesis 2-3.<sup>5</sup> In patristic commentary and writing, the subordination and inferiority of Eve, and therefore of all women, were established even before the Fall by reason of the primacy of Adam's creation. Adam, first in time and founder of mankind, was created in God's image; Eve, subsequently formed out of the matter of Adam's side, was made only in the image of Adam. Eve's supervenience defines her ontological status before the Fall and also accounts for her subsequent betrayal of mankind.<sup>6</sup> Lacking Adam's intel-

<sup>3</sup> On Aquinas and women, see Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology", *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 213-266, and Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson (eds.), *Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook of Christian Thought*, 78-101. McLaughlin notes that in the new anthropology of Christianity, equality of men and women occurred only within the resurrected state; however, this equality was problematic since "an essentially androcentric Christology fundamentally weakens the theoretical equivalence of the order of salvation" (220-221), and theologians continued to debate the issue of the sex of the resurrected soul.

<sup>4</sup> See Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman", 183-213; and Giulia Sissa, "The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle", *A History of Women in the West, I: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, 46-81. On the enormous influence of Aristotle on medieval scientific, social, and political thought, see Prudence Allen, R.S.N., *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution. 750 B.C. to 1250 A.D.*; Sidonie Smith, "Renaissance Humanism and the Misbegotten Man, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation" 20-43; and Claude Thomasset, "The Nature of Woman", *A History of Women in the West. II: Silences of the Middle Ages*, 43-69.

<sup>5</sup> On the Church Fathers, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", *Religion and Sexism*, 150-183; and R. Howard Bloch, "Molestiae Nuptiarum and the Yahwist Creation" and "Early Christianity and the Estheticization of Gender", *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 13-35, 37-63.

<sup>6</sup> While both sexes are marked by the *imago dei* and the possession of a rational soul, Thomas follows Augustine in his view that man possesses the image of God in a way different from and superior to the image found in the woman. Rational faculties are stronger in the male than in the female because, as Aristotle notes, the inferior quality and reproductive finality of the female body exercise a deleterious effect on a woman's soul. Her sensuality, identified with her essence as a woman, involves a

lectual fullness, she is easily persuaded by the serpent to eat of the forbidden fruit; afterward, her deceptive words lead Adam to betray God's commandment.

Eve's misuse of language is an ironic inversion of Adam's earlier use of language (in naming the animals) as a means of intellection:

[I]f Adam is the first namer, associated with a language that is unified, perfectly expressive of intent or spirit, Eve is associated with fallen language (...), with the division, difference, fragmentation, and dispersal that characterize the condition of historical language. If the first Adam is associated with the spirit of an utterance, Eve is associated with its letter, divided from intent or spirit, fragmentary, limited, and unstable.<sup>7</sup>

Precisely because that misuse of language in service to desire is a source of disorder, Eve's entrance into the realm of public discourse eventuates in the catastrophic expulsion of man and woman from Eden. It also eventuates in the identification of Eve's word with the serpent's speech: she is double-tongued, captious, evil-speaking (Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 30).

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weaker and more imperfect body and affects her intelligence upon which moral judgement is based; the inequality between man and woman thus extends to the moral as well as the physical and intellectual. Moreover, even in her specific generative function, woman is inferior to man, for man is the active and fecund force, woman a passive receptacle. On every level, woman is subordinate and auxiliary (McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes", 218).

<sup>7</sup> Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 6-7; R. Howard Bloch extends the homology of woman and fallen language and examines related figures—woman as riot, woman as excess, woman as rhetoric—in "Medieval Misogyny", 1-24.

Consequently, biblical tradition expounded in the old Testament, the New Testament writings of Paul, the Church Fathers, and scholastic theologians insist repeatedly on the necessity of proscribing female speech.

Now the meaning culture assigns to sexual difference—the ideology of gender—has always constituted *a*, if not *the*, fundamental ideological system for interpreting and understanding individual identity and social dynamics (Smith, "A Poetics of Women's Autobiography", 48). A defining characteristic of woman, in both the classical and Christian exegetical traditions, is her corporeality, her association with matter and the physical body as opposed to man's association with form and soul. The assimilation of male/female dualism into a soul/body dualism in patristic theology conditions the basic definition of woman, both in terms of her subordination to man in the order of nature and her "carnality" in the disorder of sin. Medieval gender ideologies invade and inform those prevailing discourses—theological, philosophical, scientific, socioeconomic, political, literary—which define and prescribe woman as well as her relationship to language in the late Middle Ages.

Feminist approaches to medieval literature have examined how this ideology of gender has inflected medieval literary theory and practice. What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary auctoritas, of both authorship and authority, are exclusively male-gendered? How does Teresa as a woman writer revise or rewrite her precursor texts which are without exception male-authored? How does a medieval woman writer reproduce in her text a female authority

and how does this construct relate to the prevailing master discourse about femaleness?

Medieval hermeneutics is also intricately gendered: medieval literary practice associates acts of writing and related acts of signifying—allegorizing, interpreting, glossing, translating—with the masculine and identifies the surfaces on which these acts are performed—the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning—with the feminine.<sup>8</sup> In the literary culture of the late Middle Ages, whoever exerts control of signification, of language and the literary act, is associated with the masculine.<sup>9</sup> While these gendered conventions are implicitly and necessarily violated once Teresa de Cartagena allegorizes, interprets, glosses, and translates in writing her first work, *Arboleda de los enfermos*, they are, as we shall see, explicitly thematized and intentionally subverted in her subsequent defense.

*Admiración operum Dey* is the product of a sustained critical rereading by Teresa of her previous text and of the literary, social, and cultural conventions that provided the context for both her own writing and the hostility of her

detractors. In addressing her right to read and write according to her own experience and interests, Teresa becomes a more self-conscious and critical reader/writer; *Admiración* represents her deepening awareness of what she had attempted and accomplished in *Arboleda*, and there is considerable continuity between the two works as we might expect in an apologetic defense that both thematizes and reaffirms the prior act of writing.

By situating Teresa's defense in the context of prevailing ideologies of gender and the heavily male gendering of medieval literary theory and practice, we can better appreciate the subtle subversiveness of her literary strategies. For example, the unusual bilingual title—*Admiración operum Dey*—anticipates Teresa's arguments about the constructed tradition of male letters. Walter Ong has examined how in the Middle Ages, the mother tongue, the vernacular, was in large part the language of the illiterate while Latin became a sex-linked language, a badge of male identity, taught as a rite of passage in the schools.<sup>10</sup> In *Arboleda*, Teresa intercalates Latin phrases to establish her knowledge of Latin and her authoritative status as a lettered person: "*Oprobrium hominum et abiecio Plebis*", "*In camo et freno maxillas eorum constrinie, qui non aproximant ad te*", "*Libenter gloriabor*", "*facere et docere*". The prominent situating of *operum Dey* in the title of her defense insistently flags her aggressive reentry into the field of male letters.

<sup>8</sup> Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 9; Dinshaw examines the lively tradition of sexualized literary discourse in the Middle Ages and the sexual metaphors that were commonplace and influential in late medieval literature: "The variety, range, and popularity in the Middle Ages of works which represent literary activity by means of gendered models argue for the fundamental nature of this correlation between the use and interpretation of language, on the one hand, and the social relations and organization of gendered bodies on the other hand" (14). She persuasively argues for the continuity of patriarchal thinking about signification from Augustine to Lévi-Strauss to Lacan.

<sup>9</sup> Dinshaw is concerned with masculine and feminine as socially constructed roles or positions that can be occupied or performed by either sex.

<sup>10</sup> Ong, "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite", 103-124, and *The Presence of the Word*: 249-252. Donovan "The Silence is Broken," *Woman and Language in Literature and Society*, 205-218) notes the effects of the masculinizing of Latin on early women writers.

In *Admiración*, a pervasive and subversive irony proceeds from Teresa's double audience and subtends the structure and rhetoric of her defense. In *Arboleda*, Teresa directs her confessional autobiography primarily to her inscribed reader, "virtuosa señora", and secondarily to a more general audience of which "virtuosa señora" is an extension. In *Admiración*, "virtuosa señora" serves as the pretext for Teresa's writing ("E porque me dizen, virtuosa señora, que el ya dicho bolumen de papeles bor[r]ados aya venido a la notiçia del señor Gómez Manrique e vuestra, no sé sy la dubda, a bueltas del tractado se presentó a vuestra discreçión", 114) but is not identified with the secondary readership of Teresa's defense, those prudent men who are her detractors.<sup>11</sup> Teresa's ironic commentary is thus aimed at a double audience: her defense is ostensibly addressed to the "virtuosa señora" who acts more as an accomplice than a judge,<sup>12</sup> and rhetorical points are scored against her hostile but absent and silenced detractors. We can examine the mechanics of this structural irony in the following example:

De ser la henbra ayudadora del varón, leémoslo en el Génesy, que después que Dios ovo formado el ombre del limo de la tierra e

ovo ysp[i]rado en él espíritu de vida, dixo: "No es bueno que sea el onbre solo; hagámosle adjutorio semejante a el." E bien se podría aquí arguir cuál es de mayor vigor, el ayudado o el ayudador: ya vedes lo que a esto responde la razón. Nas porque estos argumentos e quistiones hazen a la arrogancia mundana e vana e non aprovechan cosa a la devoción e huyen mucho del propósito e final entención mia, la qual no es, ni plega a Dios que sea, de ofender al estado superior e onorable de los prudentes varones, ni tanpoco fauoresçer al fimineo, mas solamente loar la onipotencia e sabiduría e magnificencia de Dios, que asy en las henbras como en los varones puede yspirar e fazer obras de grande admiración e magnificencia a loor y gloria del santo Nonbre ... (118)

Having noted that God created woman as a helpmeet to man, Teresa ironically comments: "And one could well argue here whether the helped or the helper has the greater strength, and you clearly see what reason would respond", thus engaging the complicity of *virtuosa señora*. Having scored her point, she interjects an ironic disclaimer: she won't continue in this vein because "these arguments and disputes make for worldly and vain arrogance and do not profit devotion" —an implicit comparison with the mean-spirited and arrogant accusations of her detractors—"and divert any purpose and intention which is not to offend the superior and honorable condition of prudent men nor to favor women, but rather to praise the omnipotence and wisdom of God who in women as well as men can effect works of great wonder and magnificence ..."

Not the least irony in *Admiración* is the subversive tautology of *prudentes varones* in

<sup>11</sup> Cited passages are from Hutton's critical edition; pages are enclosed in parentheses. English translations are from my forthcoming translation and study.

<sup>12</sup> Because "virtuosa señora" is an extension in *Arboleda* of a greater audience and because her principal rhetorical function is to initiate Teresa's writing, she is only directly addressed once in the earlier work. In contrast, she is invoked repeatedly in *Admiración* (eleven times) and her complicity is underscored in the affective formulas applied to her ("muy discreta señora," "muy discreta e amada señora," "muy virtuosa señora," "mi grand señora," "muy amada señora").

the first part of her defense, all the more striking in Spanish because of the position of the adjective (*prudentes varones* instead of *varones prudentes*). In the latter case, the descriptive adjective differentiates a group of men, but in Teresa's case, *prudentes varones*, the descriptive adjective becomes an epithet and precedes the noun, denoting an inherent characteristic of the noun taken as a whole. Thus the unnecessary repetition of *prudentes varones* while Teresa is demonstrating that their incredulity is, in fact, unwise, ironically insinuates that their prudence is determined by their socially constructed maleness, not their actions.

As the basis of her defense, Teresa argues the social rather than divine construction of gender:

E asy que sy plogo a Dios de fazer el sexu veril o varonil robusto o valiente y el fimeño flaco e de pequeño vigor, no es de creer que lo hizo por dar más ventaja o eçelencia al vn estado que al otro, mas solamente yo creo que por el respecto ya dicho, conuiene a saber: porque ayudando lo vno a lo ál, fuese conservada la natura vmana e aduer[tie]sen las maravillosas obras de la su onipotencia e sabiduria e bondad (118).

While God invested the sexes with certain differences, these have been subsequently constructed into human categories of superiority and inferiority. Like hierarchies of gender that define the inferiority of women, literary conventions are likewise socially constructed, not divinely ordained: "Ca los varones hazer libros e aprender çiençias e vsar dellas, tiénelo asy en vso de antiguo tienpo que paresçe ser avido por natural curso e por esto ninguno se marauilla. E las henbras que no lo han avido en vso, ni aprende[n] çiençias, ni tienen el entendimiento

tan perfecto como los varones, es avido por maravilla" (115). Male authorship—established through custom and usage—has been mistaken as a natural phenomenon rather than a social convention and women's writing because it is un-conventional is considered an un-natural *maravilla*. The institution of literature and learning has been passed down from male to male; in the following passage, Teresa delineates a masculine chain of *translatio studii* from master to disciple: "ca si bien lo considerasen, fallarlan que los que agora son maestros, en otro tienpo fueron diçipulos, e aquéllos cuyos diçipulos fueron, otro maestro los mostró. E asy enseñando los vnos a los otros e aprendiendo, son venidas las çiençias [i.e., acquired knowledge] a las manos de aquéllos [i.e., the prudent men] que agora las tienen e saben ..." (127). Male letters is thus an example of the blessings of nature and fortune, those sublunary blessings we often attribute to people here on earth although their ultimate source is God.

Women's writing, on the other hand, is a blessing of grace: "Pero los bienes de graçia, asy como mayores e más syngulares, reseruó en sí, ca éstos ni los avemos por vigor de natura ni por buena dicha de la ventura, ni por otra alguna arte ni endustria humana los podría[mos] aver, sino solamente por la bondad e misericordia e graçia de Dios; asy que, en verdad, ellos tienen propio nonbre e apellido [d]e bienes de graçia" (123). She then lists seven examples of blessings of grace, concluding with a reference to her own case:

E asy seguira que quando vieremos que Dios ha fecho o faze de nada alguna cosa, loaremos la su onipotencia; e quando viéremos que de pequeñas cosas ha fecho e faze Dios grandes cosas, loaremos la su manifiçencia; e

quando viéremos que a los synples e rudos entendimientos haze Dios sabidores e guardadores de la ley, lo[a]remos a su eternal sabiduria; e quando viéremos que a los malos da Dios entender e obrar algunos bienes, loaremos su ynestimable bondad; e quando viéremos que los buenos e justos reçiben de Dios premios e gualardones, loaremos la su justiçia; e quando viéremos que a los pecadores faze Dios graçias e merçedes, e loaremos la su grand misericordia; e sy viéremos que las henbras hazen tractados, e loaremos los dones de la su santa graçia e diuinal larg[u]eza (125-126).

Moreover, Teresa insists on the inscrutability of such blessings: "... ca en éstos [i.e., bienes de graçia] no conviene escadruñar nin aver respecto al estado de la persona, que sea varón o enbra; ni a la dispusyçion e abilidad del entendimiento, que sea muy capaz o del todo ynsuficiente; ni al mérito de las obras, que sea justo o muy grand pecador. Ca todo esto o más desto sobra e eçede la graçia divina e hinche muy abondosamente los logares vazlos de nuestras defetuositydades" (123-124). To doubt Teresa's authorship of *Arboleda*, therefore, is to doubt God's capacity for grace and generosity.

In refuting the socially constructed inferiority of women, Teresa also calls into question other literary conventions. To illustrate her point that God created differences between man and woman "so that each would be the preservation and adjunct of the other", Teresa offers a botanical example:

Esy queredes bien nirar las plantas e árboles, veréys como las cortezas de fuera son muy rezias e fuertes e sofridoras de las [ten]pestades que los tienpos hazen, aguas e yelos e calores e fríos. Están asy enxeridas he hechas

por tal son que no paresçen syno vn gastón firme e rezió para conservar e ayudar el meollo qu'está en[cerc]ado de dentro. E asy por tal horden e manera anda lo vno a lo ál, que la fortaleza e rezidunbre de las cortezas guardan e conservan el meollo, sufriendo esterioramente las tenpestades ya dichas. El meollo asy como es flaco e delicado, estando yncluso, obra ynteriormente, da virtud e vigor a las cortezas e asy lo vno con lo al se conserva e ayuda e nos da cada año la diversidá o conposidad de las frutas que vedes. E por este mismo respeto creo yo quel soberano e poderoso Señor quiso e quiere en la natura vmana obra[r] estas dos contrariedades, conviene a saber: el estado varonil, fuerte e valiente, e el fimineo, flaco e delicado (117).

Teresa here inverts the gendering of allegorical reading which associates the outer pleasurable, "lying" surface of the text, the corteza or letter that appeals to the physical senses with sinful carnality (the flesh, the body) and with woman, and the hidden inner core of the text, the meollo or spirit that appeals to the intellect with man. Woman in the traditional Pauline model of reading is the text's letter that must be passed through, stripped away, or penetrated to get to its truth, its spirit—its male spirit as St. Ambrose and other Church Fathers suggest.<sup>13</sup> By homologizing male/corteza and female/meollo, Teresa subverts conventional patristic paradigms of allegorical reading and associates woman with spirit and the higher truth, man with carnality and the letter.

<sup>13</sup> See Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 19-22; the gendering of patristic heuristic models is ultimately traced to exegetical readings of the creation associating Eve with fallen language and Adam with its truth.

Finally, there is another tradition of gendered hermeneutics in the Middle Ages that identifies acts of writing and related acts of signifying with the masculine and the surfaces on which these acts are performed—the page, the text—with the feminine.<sup>14</sup> Teresa invokes this hermeneutic paradigm in her beautifully expressive reaffirmation of authorship of *Arboleda*:

Maravillanse las gentes de lo que en el tractado escreuí e yo me maravillo de lo que en la verdad callé; mas no me maravillo dudando ni fago mucho en me maravillar creyendo. Pues la yspirençia me faze çierta e Dios de la verdad sabe que yo no oue otro Maestro ni me consejé con otro algund letrado, ni lo traslade de libros, como algunas personas con maliciosa admiración suelen dezir. Mas sóla ésta es la verdad: que Dios de las ciencias, Señor de las virtudes, Padre de las misericordias, Dyos de toda consolación, el que nos consuela en toda tribulación nuestra, Él solo me consoló, e Él solo me enseñó, e Él solo me leyó (131).

The wonderfully enigmatic and suggestive image of God reading Teresa's body as a text—her closed and silent body that has been imprinted with her suffering—recalls Teresa's identification of her self and her text in *Arboleda de los enfermos*. Teresa, then, positions herself as a (feminine) text that God reads and inter-

prets; as a consequence of His reading, He enlightens her understanding so that she acquires the knowledge to write her treatise, hence the second—more conventional—reading of “Él solo me leyó” (“He alone read to me”).

Yet Teresa would argue that this constructed feminine position is, in fact, occupied by all writers, male and female, and only the conventionality of male authorship has diverted our recognition from God as the ultimate Auctor who interprets, glosses, and authorizes meaning.<sup>15</sup> Teresa redefines patriarchal notions of male authorship by referring these to God who then authorizes the writing of texts by illuminating human understanding and revealing His truth and knowledge. This is a remarkable strategy in Teresa's defense: by feminizing both male and female writers with regard to God, she rewrites and expands the androcentric perspective of her detractors. This need for problematizing and redefinition remains a challenge in contemporary feminism as well, for when the female viewpoint becomes defined negatively, it remains a function of what it opposes.<sup>16</sup> Teresa's procedure circumvents this negative definition of her viewpoint and con-

<sup>14</sup> Masculine and feminine denote “roles, positions, functions that can be taken up, occupied, or performed by either sex, male or female (although not with equal ease or investment ... )” (Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 9). Moreover, the significance and value of the masculine and the feminine in such a model of gendered hermeneutics can constantly shift and change in the exegetical tradition and, as we shall see, in Teresa's defense.

<sup>15</sup> “E sy los varones hazen libros e conpendiosos tractados no se maravillan, ca es atribuydo a su mesmo seso e suficiencia de entendimiento de aquel que los haze, e a las grandes e naturales çiençias que saben; e nada refieren a gloria de Dios, ni creo que se acuerden donde vinieron las naturales çiençias que los varones aprenden en los estudios, e los que las saben, dónde las ouieron e quién se las enseñó” (126-127).

<sup>16</sup> “However, the posture of resistance and combat that perforce she [the feminist reader/critic] adopts imposes its own distortions. In particular, the female viewpoint becomes defined negatively and thus remains a function of what it opposes” (Flynn and Schweickart, “Introduction,” *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, xx).



founds stable and distinct binary categories of gender (female/male, body/soul, letter/spirit, corteza/meollo).

Teresa's defense is thus implemented through a variety of complementary strategies. In subverting gendered notions of masculinity and femininity and their application to medieval

literary theory and practices, Teresa reaffirms her authorship of *Arboleda de los enfermos* by arguing its possibility as a blessing of grace and reestablishes the exemplarity of her fiction, circumventing her limited symbolic value as an afflicted woman and casting herself instead as a more universal exemplar of suffering humanity.

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