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# Self-Fashioning and the Intersectional Self: Teresa de Cartagena by Teresa de Cartagena<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article examines the way in which Teresa de Cartagena builds and presents her literary self in her literary works, *Arboleda de los enfermos* and *Admiración operum Dei*. The examination of this literary self-fashioning (a concept based, but different from, the one coined under the same denomination by Stephen Greenblatt) of Teresa de Cartagena is conducted under the theoretical framework of intersectionality, which allows to see the multi-layered and dynamic complex nature of this author's literary self, and the implications this has for the understanding of her work.

*Para Jesús R. Velasco,  
con disculpas por mi pigracia.*

## 1 Foreword: Intersectionality and literary studies

Intersectionality is a conceptual paradigm that has been developed and shaped across an ample array of diverse fields and disciplines in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It has gained wide currency—to the point of having been labelled a “buzzword” in the social sciences—across subjects such as sociology, political science, psychology, gender studies and race studies, especially in the areas of these disciplines oriented more to public practice and social action than to theoretical speculation.<sup>2</sup> In spite of its general acceptance in these fields, an exact definition of the term remains difficult to pin down. In this essay I rely upon the working definition of *intersectionality* as a theoretical framework in the social sciences that approaches personal and social identity as a multi-dimen-

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<sup>2</sup> See Davis (2008, 67–85).

sional, complex construct based on a plurality of aspects—race, gender, ideology, ethnicity, social class, disability, etc.—rather than as a monolithic, aprioristically given static label defining a certain social niche in a social structure understood as a system of power.

Thus an essential principle of intersectionality is that in order to understand any given personal or social identity properly it is essential to analyse it both in the complex interaction of all its constituent elements and in the even more complex, and often problematic, interaction of all these elements with social and institutional practices, beliefs, and ideologies. To give a simple yet illustrative idea of this, intersectionality would not isolate race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and ethnicity as a set of labels from which a given identity would be defined by a process of mere addition or superposition, but rather would see the mutual interaction and structural constellation of all these, and other possible similar social and personal elements, as the key aspect in a definition of any given personal or social identity. It is relevant to highlight that intersectionality as a theory has had particular importance in certain specific fields such as women's studies and gender studies over the years.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore easy to see why, given its strong presence in the fields of gender studies, race studies and women's studies, some scholars consider intersectionality a useful theoretical framework or methodology of analysis in the field of cultural and literary studies. In spite of this clear potential interest, it is not easy to find many examples of the intersectional approach to literature and culture. The field of children's and young adult literature has been particularly partial to this approach, others not so much.<sup>4</sup> Caroline Levine "builds on some of the insights of intersectional analysis" in her attempt at bridging the insufficiencies of the links between literary forms and social formations in the area of cultural studies, and Wai Chew Sim has approached the fiction writings of the Malaysian-Chinese writer Chuah Guat Eng using intersectionality as his main analytical method.<sup>5</sup> The strong potential of the application of intersectionality to the field of literary studies, and specifically to that of medieval literary studies, was precisely

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<sup>3</sup> The bibliography on the definition, importance and implications of intersectionality as a paradigm in the social sciences is already vast. I take most of the ideas in this introductory paragraph from the very useful chapter by Hill Collins / Chepp (2013). Other sources of information I have used are, in order of publication: Phoenix / Pattynama (2006, 187–92); Yuval-Davis (2006, 193–209); Hancock (2007, 248–54) and Hancock (2007, 63–79); C. Nash (2008, 1–15); Warner (2008, 5–6, 454–63); Weldon (2008, 193–218); Dhamoon (2011, 230–43); Carbado et.al. (2013, 303–12); Cho et. al. (2013, 785–810); Clarke / McCall (2013, 349–63); Cooper (2015, 385–406); May (2015); Hill Collins / Bilge (2016) and Hancock (2016).

<sup>4</sup> See Schieble (2012, 212–21); Z. Lester (2014, 244–75).

<sup>5</sup> Levine (2006, 625–57, quotation, p. 652); Sim (2014, 33–46).

what led a number of Oxford academics to meet in a session of the Oxford Medieval Studies Workshop on Wednesday 15 March 2017 entitled “Medieval Intersectionality”. More recently, when the first version of this paper was already completed, and thanks to my dear friend Jesús R. Velasco (Yale University), I knew of the monographic issue of *Postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* devoted to Intersectionality and Medieval Studies, edited by Nicole Sidhu and Samantha Katz Seal.<sup>6</sup> It contains, besides a brief, but telling, short article on the cover of the issue by Eileen A. Fradenburg Joy and an introduction by the editors, nine articles on different medieval cultural topics in which intersectional approaches and methodologies are used. All of them display, in different ways and degrees, the deep insight and strong grasp that this theoretical paradigm can provide for those working in the field of Medieval Studies. I fully agree with the statement made by Seal and Sidhu in their introduction to the issue:

Intersectional feminism claims the whole damn field. It recognizes that the study of race in the Middle Ages, of the colonial practices and heritages of the Middle Ages, of queer sexuality, of the disabled body, of the nonhuman and nonliving, and of so much more, are all inseparable from the study of gender. And it recognizes that there is no field of medieval studies unavailable to these modes of analysis. There is no paleography untouched by race, no Middle English literature unhaunted by the Jew, no legal code removed from female hands. The Middle Ages were a wild and vibrant time, featuring the interweaving of many different cultures, ideas, and beliefs. It is only our analysis that has narrowed and restricted our understanding of this complex and dynamic world. To fail to be intersectional is to fail to be just, but, even more importantly, it is to fail to be accurate. It is an intellectual, as well as an ethical, error.<sup>7</sup>

I find that this statement perfectly frames the fact that the nature of the Iberian Middle Ages, where the contact across cultures was much more intense than elsewhere in Europe and remarkable cases of female agency abound, and the particular case of the author I intend to study in this article, Teresa de Cartagena, remarkably complex in terms of the definition of her own social identity, make intersectionality a potentially very fruitful approach to both.

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<sup>6</sup> Seal / Sidhu (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Seal / Sidhu (2019, 274).

## 2 A case study: Teresa de Cartagena and her intersectional self

Intersectionality provides a framework within which to explore how socio-personal identities are, by definition, multi-layered and polymorphic rather than unidimensional and simple, and how they are constructed through the intersection between these multiple layers and their interaction with other social factors, categories, and actors.<sup>8</sup> Such a framework manifests itself as particularly well suited for analysing the life and work of the fifteenth-century Castilian writer Teresa de Cartagena. Woman, nun, disabled (deaf, to be precise), *conversa*, member of a powerful and influential family, and woman of letters, her personal identity would surely have been shaped by the intertwining of all these aspects. Furthermore (and more importantly for us, as we are occupied in literary, or socio-literary analysis), the image of herself that she constructs and projects in the works she wrote, deeply engaged as they are in the expression of personal and autobiographic issues, does not present all these aspects of her personal identity on an equal footing: her strategies of self-fashioning<sup>9</sup> respond to a clear purpose and intention, and are shaped not only by personal impulses or agendas, but also by the actions and reactions triggered by her own self-represented identity and by the ideas she expresses in her works, and, very significantly, by the way in which these actions and reactions intersect with the different layers of her personal identity.<sup>10</sup>

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**8** For the idea of a multi-layered, complex view of identity as a meaning-producing intersectional matrix see A. Rummens (2003, 10–25); Dhamoon (2011, 236–39).

**9** The basis of my use of the term *self-fashioning* is in a well-known and extremely influential book by Stephen Greenblatt (1980). But rather than using it as the cultural, social concept operating in western-European societies in early modern times that it is in Greenblatt's book (see especially pp. 1–9), I use it here in a slightly different, yet very much related, sense: as the willing, conscious operation conducted by a writer in order to create in a literary text (per force of a self-referential nature) an image of him or herself in terms of a personal and social identity (an image that may correspond, to a greater or a lesser degree –or even not at all–, with the personal and social identity of the author in real life). That is, differences of detail aside, the general understanding of the concept that prevails in the studies gathered in Delbrugge (2015), articulated around the concept of self-fashioning. One of them, Piera (2015), approaches the Santa María-Cartagena family as a case of “communal self-fashioning”, and devotes some valuable pages to Teresa (327–365), written from premises very different to the ones on which I base my analysis.

**10** The most important source of information about her life is Seidenspinner-Núñez / Kim (2004, 121–50), where relevant previous sources are cited; substantial additional information will appear in the preliminary study of my forthcoming edition, Teresa de Cartagena, *Arboleda de los enfermos. Admiración operum Dei*, Juan-Carlos Conde (ed.). At present the works can be consulted

## 2.1 *Arboleda de los enfermos*: coping with illness and disability

Cartagena's first work, *Arboleda de los enfermos*, meditates on and provides a theological justification for the meaning and purpose of disability. Cartagena embarks upon this textual endeavour from the standpoint of her own status as a disabled individual (she was deaf), powerfully implemented in the text through its authoritative first-person enunciation.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore hardly surprising to see that disability and illness, and Cartagena's own personal condition, have a very prominent role in the text, and that they enter the scene from very early on, in fact, already in the prologue of the text. Even earlier, the opening rubric of the manuscript sets the record straight, with this *argumento* – in the sense the word has when applied to the paratextual elements of *Celestina* – that accurately summarizes the theme and content of *Arboleda*:

Este tractado se llama *Arboleda de los enfermos*, el qual compuso Teresa de Cartajena seyendo apasionada de graves dolencias, especialmente aviendo el sentido del oýr perdido del todo, e fizo aquesta obra a loor de Dios e espiritual consolación suya e de todos aquellos que enfermedades padescen, porque despedidos de la salud corporal levante[n] su deseo en Dios, que es verdadera salut. (f. 1r / p. 37)<sup>12</sup>

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in Teresa de Cartagena, *Arboleda de los enfermos*. *Admiración operum Dey*, Hutton (ed.) (1967); there is an English translation, Seidenspinner-Núñez (trans.) (1988). An analysis of the dynamics between Teresa de Cartagena's personal identity and the "constructed textual-self" in her works can be found in Kautzman (2003); her methodological approach and focus of study are very different from the ones I apply in this paper.

**11** The best study of the subject of disability in the work of Teresa de Cartagena is Pearson (2010); a recent monograph on disability in medieval Spanish literature has given to the presence of this topic in the works of Cartagena the importance it deserves, Scarborough (2018, 207–18). Other contributions to the subject are Cammarata (2000, 38–51); Juárez (2002, 131–43); chapter 3 of Rivera-Cordero (2005, 125–75); Kim (2006, 22–32 and 2008). Hussar (2006, 151–69) develops an analysis of deafness in *Arboleda* as a figurative representation of the *converso* condition in reaction to *anti-converso* literature and opinions. Intelligent as his analysis is, I remain unpersuaded by his hypothesis.

**12** All quotations from Teresa de Cartagena's works are from my forthcoming edition (see note 9, above; henceforth *Arboleda*, ed. Conde), which seeks to improve on that of Hutton (henceforth *Arboleda*, ed. Hutton), commendable for its time and all the more so considering its protracted process of publication; see Conde (2017, 45–80). To allow referencing to my still unpublished edition, citations are by leaf in the single extant MS (Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial h.III.24, ff. 1r–66r—both Hutton and I include references to this foliation in our editions), followed after a slash by the page in Hutton's edition.

In all likelihood, however, this rubric was not produced by the author of the text. Proceeding into textual grounds of firm authorial stability, illness and disability appear very early on in the prologue to *Arboleda*. They do so firstly in a somewhat elusive and allegorical way. In the opening of the prologue Teresa de Cartagena says that “la niebla de tristeza temporal e humana cubrió los términos de mi bevir, e con un espeso torvellino de angustiosas pasiones me llevó a una ýnsula que se llama ‘Oprobrium hominum et abiecio plebis’, donde tantos años ha que en ella bivo, si vida llamar se puede.” (f. 1r / p. 37).<sup>13</sup> Soon thereafter, illness and disability as experienced by the author appear mentioned in the same prologue in a more specific and unequivocal way:

E porque mi pasyón es de tal calidat e tan porfiosa que tan poco me dexa oýr los buenos consejos como los malos, conviene sean tales los consejos consoladores que syn dar bozes a mi sorda oreja me pued[a]n poner en la claustra de sus graçiosos e santos consejos, para lo qual es neçesario de recorrer a los libros, los quales de arboledas saludables tienen en sí maravillosos enxertos. (f. 1v / p. 38).

As previously noted, the whole work is a meditation on disability and illness, and a theological justification of its existence and purpose. It is therefore to be expected that disability features not only at the beginning, but prominently throughout the entire work, and that the author, as owner of the enunciative voice that creates the text, fashions herself textually mainly on the basis of one of the layers of her personal identity: that of a disabled person.

Disability is firstly depicted in a clearly negative light. Being identified as disabled causes a serious degree of friction and tension in most social interactions in which the individual in question is involved:

Pues la soledat no puedo apartar de mí, quiero fuir la oçiosidat, porque non pueda travar casamiento con la soledat, ca sería un pelygroso matrimonio; e sy puede así arredrar de mí diestro lado la soledad la oçiosidat del lado siniestro, non dubdedes que en ello afanar por descanso lo avría mi mano; ca segund la calidad de mi pasión, sy bien lo mirardes, más sola me verés en compañía de muchos que non quando sola me retraygo a mi çelda. Es esta la causa: quando estoy sola soy aconpañada de mí mesma e de ese pobre sentido que tengo; pero quando en compañía de otrie me veo, yo soy desanparada del todo, ca nin gozo del

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**13** In order to understand this passage, and many others in the works of Teresa de Cartagena, it is essential to keep in mind that *passión* has the meaning ‘sickness, illness’, not ‘passion’ as in modern Spanish; see Aelius Antonius Nebrissensis (sig. k5v s.v.) “Passion del cuerpo, *passio*; *morbis*, -i”, and the word’s sixth meaning in Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana [Diccionario de autoridades]*, 1726–1739, v, 153 “passión. En la Medicina se toma por el afecto ù dolor sensible de alguna de las partes del cuerpo, que padece alguna enfermedad ù desorden.”

consorcio o fabla de aquellos nin de mí mesma me puedo aprovechar. Fuye de mí el sentido, ca está ocupado en sentir la desyqual pena que syento; apártase la razón con el muy raz[on]able tormento que la aflige. La discreción es poca, pero aunque mucha fuese, asaz ternía que ver en provocar los movimientos humanos a paçiençia. E donde el oýr fallése, ¿qué tiene que ver el fablar? ¿Qué dará la presençia muerta e sola del todo? Asý que por estas razones, e por el yspirençia que las faze dignas de fee, se puede creer de mí quán[t]o estoy sola. (f. 2r / pp. 38–39)

Two ideas emerge from this long quotation. The first is that the disabled subject will struggle to interact socially with non-disabled subjects; she is hindered not only physically by being affected by an illness, but also from a social point of view, since the illness precludes normal social interaction. Thus, the interaction between the disabled self and the socially able others creates frustration, anger, and loneliness. The second idea emerging from this quotation hints at considerations of a moral nature: disability causes loneliness by dint of social exclusion, and that loneliness can, in addition, bring with it “oçiosydat”: an idleness which is potentially dangerous *per se*. In order to avoid it, the author makes a decision: to write the work that we, the readers, have in our hands: “Pues asý es que esta tan esquivia e durable soledat apartar de mí no puedo, quiero hazer guerra a la [o]çiosydat ocupándome en esta peque[ñ]a obra, la qual bien se puede dezir que no es buena nin comunal, mas mala del todo” (f. 2r-v / p. 39). The logical loop is easy to close: disability causes loneliness, loneliness can lead to idleness, and through writing Teresa de Cartagena escapes the risks associated to idleness. Illness and disability indirectly become the forces that push Teresa de Cartagena to write and thereby become an author. Even if one does not accept the author’s reasoning as presented in the text, it is clear that her deep wish to comprehend why God would punish any of His creatures with pain, discomfort and the inability to engage normally in social interaction and human communication is at the root of the authorial impulse that results in the writing of *Arboleda*.

Disability even encumbers basic, fundamental forms of socialization such as family life:

Yo non sé para qué queremos los enfermos cosa deste mundo, ca bien que rodeemos no hallaremos en él cosa que bien nos quiera. Los plazerres que en él son del todo nos habo[r]resçen, la salut nos desanpara, los amigos nos olvidan, los parientes se enojan y aun la propia madre se enoja con la hija enferma y el padre abor[r]esçe al hijo que con continuas dolencias le ocupare la posada. (f. 19r / p. 63)

This damaged intersection of disability and family life projects itself deep into the social structure, and can even trump forms of social status based on familiar or genealogical structures, upon which medieval society was heavily reliant. Teresa

herself notes this conflictive intersection: according to her, the sick, disabled person,

aunque sea hijo de un duque, almirante o marqués, sy de grave dolencia o plaga vergonçosa es herido, non digo que solamente los amigos e parientes le avrán en desprecio, mas su mesmo padre y madre dispornán de le desennpachar prestamente de su casa y poner donde ningund detrimento e confusyon les pueda venir; y, aunque sea mayoradgo, será avido por menoradgo. E no solamente entre los muy propios parientes o yguales, mas entre los syervos menores de toda su progenie será despreciado y no tenido por ygal del menor de aquellos. (f. 29v / pp. 76–77)

The contrast *mayorazgo* / *menorazgo* speaks for itself, and symbolically embodies in a very expressive and forceful way the disruptive power that disability has in the familiar and the social spheres.

However, in seeing only the negative aspect of disability one merely scratches the surface, since there is more to it than meets the eye. After the end of the prologue that precedes *Arboleda de los enfermos*, the very first lines of the text read thus:

[Q]uando miro esta mi pasyón en los tenporales negoçios, véola muy penosa y de grandísima angustia, mas quando aparto el pensamiento de las cosas ya dichas, recojéndole a mi propio seno, e veo la soledad que me haze sentir, apartándome de las negoçiaçiones mundanas, llámola soledad amable, soledad bien aventurada, soledad que me haze ser sola de peligrosos males e aconpañada de seguros bienes; soledad que me aparta de cosas enpeçibles e dañosas al ánima e aun al cuerpo no muy provechosas. (ff. 2v–3r / p. 40)

Here the tables have turned. The social exclusion the author suffers because of her disability is not a negative thing but rather a blessing: it keeps her away from that which is damaging to the soul and of no particular benefit to the body. Our author emphasizes this idea with the allegorical *similitudo* that follows: in the same way that deafness prevents her from engaging in a group conversation and keeps her from participating in worldly business, it forces her to focus on her inner self, on spiritual matters, and on the salvation of her soul. On this respect, Cartagena sees her deafness as a true blessing from God.

Cartagena continues her line of reasoning by highlighting the problematic intersection between her disabled self and worldly life by presenting muteness as a subsequent addition to deafness:

E yo callando por fuerça e non escuchando de grado lo que tanto me cunplía, mas con mi neçedad a cuestas porfiando de llevar adelante mis daños, añadió su misericordia la segunda sygna del dedo en la boca, dándome claramente a entender que no es su voluntad que yo hable en las cosas del syglo, mas que calle, e del todo callar; e asaz manifesto pareçe



serme hecha esta sygna con el dedo divinal quando en tanto grado es acreçentada mi pasyón, que aunque quiero hablar no puedo, e aunque me quieren hablar no pueden. (f. 3v / p. 41)

Once again, disability is simultaneously presented as both a handicap to normal social interaction and a gift from a merciful God. The reason for this is as follows:

Con la segunda signa del dedo en la boca me manda callar el Señor soberano, demostrándome claramente en l'aumentación de mi pasyón que no es su voluntat que me ocupe en ninguna fabla mundana, mas que tenga silençio entero para que mejor pueda entender lo que con el royd de las ocupaçiones seglares entender no pudiera. Ca sin dubda mucho es el entendimiento del onbre desanparado de sý quando del todo es enbuelto en las cosas mundanas, e tanto mejor se recoje en sý mesmo quanto más se aparta de las cosas; desque alguno anda muy ocupado en negoçios dezimos que no se acuerda de sý. Mas pues para mejor recojer el entendimiento derramado e acordarse onbre de sý neçesario es que ponga sylençio a todo lo ál, ya es puesto silençio por la mano de Dios que me manda callar, e yncrepada mi nesçia porfia con aquel dedo que se entiende, demostrándome abiertamente que me conviene del todo callar, que quiere dezir del todo apartarme de las hablas mundanas y de sus deseos, que muy poco aprovecha apartar la presençia o conversaçión de aquestas cosas si el deseo e cuydado aún está en ellas enbuelto. (f. 4r-v / p. 42)

Summing up the consequences of her disability, Teresa de Cartagena writes:

Ya soy apartada de las bozes humanas, pues mis orejas non las pueden oýr: ya tienen silençio; mi lengua plazer á, pues por esta causa non puede fablar. Ya es apartado mi des[e]o en tanto grado que menor es mi deseo en las cosas tenporales que mi salut; e non me pesa tanto por lo que non puedo oýr como por lo que he oýdo en ofensa de Dios. E por mi voluntat desde la cuna me fuera dada aquesta pasyón, porque no pudiera pasar las claustras de mis orejas palabra en qu'ofendido o no servido a Dios aya. (f. 5v / pp. 43–44)

“Menor es mi deseo en las cosas tenporales que mi salut”: disability, by minimizing the willingness of those affected by it to be a part of worldly affairs and effectively reducing their involvement in such matters, keeps them from one of the three enemies—world, devil and flesh—of the good Christian (as stated in 1 John 4:3–5, or Luke 4:5–8, among other biblical passages). That assumption is the argumentative cornerstone of *Arboleda de los enfermos*, and from it emerge the theological justification and the moral recommendations that constitute most of the body of this work. Teresa de Cartagena develops, discusses or glosses this idea on almost every page. A few passages will help illustrate how she does so.

One of the points that she highlights in *Arboleda* is how effectively illness curbs not only worldly or bodily temptations (that is, those related to the world and the flesh), but also those that can have an impact on the spirit and the soul,

these being far more serious than the former. Here is her description of these salutary effects of illness and disability:

La dolencia buena y durable es cabestro para abaxar la çerviz de sobervia e es freno para costreñir y evitar los deseos dañosos y enpeçibles al ánima. E aun en esta tenporal vida que a nuestros ojos parece avemos exenplo, ca veemos que un onbre enfermo no osa ni osará comer de todas las viandas, e aun de las menos dañosas no come quanto quiere. Pues ya paresce que en los actos corporales resiste y enfrena la dolencia, ved qué deve hacer en los espirituales; ca sy discriçión pone regla en las viandas por conservar la salut tenporal, mayor discreçión e de más durable provecho es en verdat poner regla en las obras por defensyón y guarda de la salut espiritual. Sea verdat que a todos sería o es conplidero y no poco saludable guardar diecta en el dañoso manjar de los pecados, pero no es dubda que más abiertamente lo amonesta la razón a los enfermos que no a los sanos; ca asý como en las viandas corporales [a] todos es bien guardarse de lo dañoso, pues çierto es que en más estrecho y con mayor premia es costreñido de se guardar el enfermo que el sano, bien asý de los manjares dañosos al ánima que son los pecados con más premia y manifesta neçesitat se deve abstener el enfermo que no el sano. ¡O, asaz clara está la sentencia! (f. 9r-v / p. 49)

With the use of one of the many allegorical images she summons in her work, Teresa de Cartagena explains once more how particularly beneficial illness can be in order to keep oneself away from temptation and ensure spiritual salvation. This is why disability is, literally, a godsend, a gift received from God to bring us closer to Him:

Mucho es digno de preçiar e sin dubda en grande estima devemos thener tal atamiento como este, pues no se haze a otro fin syno porque nos lleguemos a Dios; e sy quisiera el Profecta bien pudiera dezir “de aquellos que pecan contra ti, de aquellos que obran maldades, de aquellos que syn themor te ofenden”, mas por su bondat e cortesýa quiso pasar so silençio nuestras malas obras, e solamente le plogo dezir “de aquellos que a ti no se allegan” por más claramente nos dar a entender con cuánto amor, con quánta misericordia se nos dan estas afliçiones e pasiones corporales, no tanto por nuestros pecados, que lo bien mereççen, como porque nos alleguemos a Dios, que es nuestro soberano Bien. ¡O quánd abundante caridat traen consygo estas mis penas, con tanto que en ellas mesmas veo reluzir la grandeza de su misericordia! Pues no por ál son dadas a mí pasyones syno porque me llegue a Dios. ¡O piadoso Señor! ¿Cuándo merecí yo tanto bien? (f. 11r-v / p. 52)<sup>14</sup>

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**14** It would be easy to multiply quotations from *Arboleda* stating similar ideas. I will limit myself to one more, because it illustrates an idea that appears ubiquitously in the text: that the intensity and severity of the illness or disability suffered is but an eloquent testimony of special love from God. “Los que contra su voluntat padescen manifesto es que más los ama quien los haze padescer que no ellos mesmos, ca segunt su nigligncia y descuydamiento antes escogerán holgando yrse al ynfierno que trabajando yr al paraýso; pues quien les quita la holgança dañosa y les da provechoso trabajo muy grande amor les muestra. Y con mucha razón le deve ser dado renonbre llamándole amor syngular; e bien se puede dezir singular asý por las causas ya dichas como por

It is clear that Teresa de Cartagena's disabled self takes central stage in *Arboleda*. This is hardly surprising for a work that has as its main topic the reasoning and the justification of the purpose and meaning of illness from the personal, testimonial perspective of a disabled person. Illness, far from being pointless and a mere human embodiment of suffering, evil and negativity, can in fact be seen as a positive thing, as a force that pushes those who suffer it far from sin and into a holier life that can safely guarantee the eternal salvation of the soul. The disabled self, as presented by Cartagena in her work, therefore conveys two main different types of intersectional experiences. The first is a problematic, negative one in terms of social and interpersonal interactions, which can be severely disrupted by disability—deafness, in the case of Teresa de Cartagena. The second, however, is a positive, beneficial one with regards to the disabled person's existence as a Christian spiritual self. Through disability, one is kept it from worldly temptations and made to focus on one's inner life, which from a Christian standpoint is essential to the achievement of the main purpose of all rational creatures ever to live on Earth: the salvation of their souls.

## 2.2 The gendered self of Teresa de Cartagena in *Arboleda de los enfermos*

Other aspects of the multilayered self of Teresa de Cartagena are manifested in *Arboleda de los enfermos*. While Cartagena's female self does appear in the text, it is not as the result of a powerful, sustained and self-conscious process of self-fashioning comparable to the one that brings forward in the text her identity as a disabled self. Rather, in *Arboleda de los enfermos* the gendered self of the author appears in a nondescript, quasi-unintentional way, not as a result of a deliberate process of self-fashioning.

To start with, the female self of Teresa de Cartagena manifests itself in an inevitable way, that is, in the zero-degree gender markers that appear in her writing due to grammatical rules and usage: pronouns, adjectives, and other grammatical elements inevitably show the gender of the speaker/writer, as shown in these examples: “así que en este exillyo e tenebroso destierro más sepultada que morada me sintiendo” (f. 1r / p. 37); “que no basta a mí ser apartada de la turbamulta dapñosa de las ocupaciones mundanas, mas el deseo que pena syn

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no ser a todos comunicable, ca aunque muchos somos los ocçiosos e nigligen[tes] en este estrecho camino de paraýso, pero no todos, antes a mi paresçer los menos, son llagados de dolenciã durables. Pues aquesta diligenciã et cura espeçial que Dios muestra en los que asý fragela çierto es que de grande e syngular amor proçede.” (f. 27r / p. 73).

[p]uerto bueno as arredrado de mí, non consyntiendo la tu piedat que tanto tienpo fuese aflegid[a] del conbate de hesos dos enemigos, los quales son querer y non poder” (f. 5r-v / p. 43). Furthermore, and while I know it would be difficult to affirm this beyond the shadow of a doubt without the help of a lexicometrical study of the language of the text, my impression is that the author even makes an effort to reduce to the indispensable minimum these gendered grammatical markers, in order to keep her discourse as widely and generally applicable as possible.

More explicit and (for lack of a better word) voluntary expressions of the female self of the author can be found scattered sparsely through the text, in all cases in the context of what is usually considered to be a commonplace form of the modesty topic, but certainly with a mark of gender. I am referring to the three instances that can be found in the text of derogatory remarks about the intellectual abilities of the author. These are the following:

E como la baxeza e grosería de mi mugeril yngenio a sobir más alto non me consienta (f. 1v / p. 38)

Esto baste para declarar el primer grado de la paçiençia segund mi pobre e mugeril yngenio lo puede comprehender o sentir (f. 24r / p. 69)

Mas porque mi grosero juyzio mugeril haze mis dichos de pequeña o ninguna abtoridad (f. 42v / p. 96)

The presence of the adjective *mugeril* in these three formulaic expressions – they can be easily connected indeed with the *captatio benevolentiae* or modesty *topos* – certainly infiltrates them with a gendered element.<sup>15</sup> However, I think that it is indisputable that it simply adds just one more element to what is, fundamentally, an activation of a rhetorical device used by both male and female writers; at most, it constitutes the passive reflection of certain wide social perceptions of women back then. While a modern interpretation might see this as hardly veiled misogyny, no medieval reader would consider formulae like this to be much more than a manifestation of modesty and an attempt to attract the readers’ benevo-

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15 It is important to mention that other instances of this formula in the text leave out if it the mention of the gender of the author, thus “segund mi rudo e grosero juyzio me ayuda” (f. 6v / p. 45), or “segund mi rudo yngenio lo puede entender” (f. 43r / p. 97). Modesty formulae are abundant in medieval literature, many of them created around the idea of the writer’s insufficient or poor intellectual ability. I cannot resist citing here a case from the pen of Teresa de Cartagena’s own grandfather, Pablo de Santa María, who closes the prologue to his *Las siete edades del mundo* (ca. 1416–18) by asking the dedicatee, King Juan II of Castile, that he “mande corregir e enmendar los errores e defectos desta obra, que non tan conplida e perfectamente de pequeño e rudo engenio va ordenada” (Conde 1999, 270b), which is proof that these manifestations of the modesty *topos* ran in the family; see Conde (ed.) (n. 23), and Deyermond (1976, 19–29).

lence. Of course, these formulae also reflect the overpowering medieval misogynistic *zeitgeist*, a manifestation (almost at the verge of being meaningless by dint of being ubiquitous) of the problematic intersection of the female self and the eminently male medieval social order.

It seems fair to conclude that, other than its obvious and almost inevitable presence thus far described, gender is not a major factor in the self-fashioning of our author as constructed in *Arboleda*, nor is it explicitly discussed or examined in the text. By contrast, it is a much more prominent aspect of her second work, *Admiración operum Dei*, as we shall soon see.

## 2.3 Other sides of the multi-layered self of Teresa de Cartagena in *Arboleda*

Another important facet of Teresa de Cartagena's identity is of course her status as a member of a religious order. When we scrutinize *Arboleda de los enfermos* for signs of her identity as a nun, the result is that this is not a side of the author's self that figures explicitly in the text at all. At no point does she directly present herself as such, and the only mention of an experience or action that takes place in a religious environment is merely circumstantial. In a passage of the text she refers to the solitude she experiences when engaging in social interaction, due to her disability: "más sola me verés en compañía de muchos que non cuando sola me retraygo a mi çelda" (f. 2r / p. 39). This mention of her quarters in the convent where she lived is the only explicit sign of the life of the author as a nun that we find in the text. Besides this, Teresa de Cartagena uses the convent as a spatializing metaphor that represents the situation of isolation and exclusion in which the ill and disabled find themselves in society, in passages such as the following:

¡O bienaventurado convento de los enfermos! (f. 13v / p. 55)

Nos devemos aleg[r]ar aquellos que en el convento de dolenças tenemos hecha profesýon. (f. 16r / p. 58)

la paçiençia tiene el prinçipado o señorío, ca si ésta non rige y manda el convento de los dolientes todas nuestras dolenças y nuestro trabajo quedaría[n] sin fruto. (f. 19v / p. 63)<sup>16</sup>

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**16** The commentary on these passages in *Arboleda*, ed. Conde, provide philological data on the use and meaning of the term *convento* in all three: it is important to note the specific meaning of the first one.

The text also features a reference to cloisters, one of the most important spaces for religious life, although the word—in the form *claustra*, rather than *claustr*<sup>17</sup>—is used in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense:

conviene sean tales los consejos consoladores que syn dar bozes a mi sorda oreja me pue-  
d[a]n poner en la claustra de sus graçiosos e santos consejos, para lo qual es neçesario de  
recorrer a los libros. (f. 1v / p. 38)  
andarse onbre riendo sus males por las calles o claustras ni es paçiençia ni descriçión.<sup>18</sup>  
(f. 43v / p. 98)

It seems clear that living in a convent as a member of a religious community is not indispensable in order to be able to put together metaphoric expressions like these. However, it is also easy to see that the metaphorical link between isolation from society due to life in a monastic community and isolation resulting from a disability that prevents the sufferer from normal social interaction and integration would ring truer when coming from someone who lives in a convent. Consequently, these metaphors need not necessarily be seen as a textual instance in which the author is explicitly fashioning herself as a nun, but it is certainly possible to see the links between a monastic life and their use.

A similar thing can be said of the obviously religious theme and gist of the text, of the sources and authorities on which its author relies to convey her message, and of the rhetorical strategies followed by her to shape her discourse, clearly taken from the *artes sermocinandi*. Of course this is a text pervaded by Christian ideas, thoughts, and principles, and quotations from the Bible and from the works of different Fathers of the Church or by classical authors very close to the Christian ethos (Boethius, for example) are prominent in it.<sup>19</sup> It could be argued that the presence and use of religious and biblical ideas and references in a text does not necessarily imply that the author of the text in question must be a member of a religious order, given the prominently clerical nature of medieval culture, and the fact that female late medieval spirituality was essentially informed by the meditative reading of certain parts of the biblical text.<sup>20</sup> However, the presence of all these elements in a text is certainly not at odds with an author

<sup>17</sup> It is worth mentioning that the form *claustra* appears in two other passages, though with meanings different from—yet etymologically related to—that of “cloister”; see *Arboleda*, ed. Conde, nn. 106, 128.

<sup>18</sup> This form is a graphic variation of the word *discreción*.

<sup>19</sup> For the importance of the Bible as source of the works of Teresa de Cartagena see Pearson (2010, 138–162) and appendixes, and Conde (2020), information on the presence of religious rhetoric and sermon style can be found in pp. 85a–87b.

<sup>20</sup> A fundamental source on this are the articles in Børresen / Valerio (eds.) (2011).

who is a member of a religious order. Other than her command of clerical culture, familiarity with the Bible, with liturgy and certain religious authors, no attempt at highlighting the author's identity as a nun is made in the text. These topics and sources are consistent with an author who is a nun, but we need not take them as elements of an intentional fashioning of a religious self.

Another side of the multifaceted self of Teresa de Cartagena presented in *Arboleda* that is of particular interest is her identity as a writer, as a woman of letters. This is particularly true when one considers the sharp contrast that it displays in terms of its explicitness and prominence in Cartagena's other work, *Admiración operum Dei*. There is, of course, an obvious zero-degree indicator of this condition: the fact that she is writing a text of certain literary ambition, intellectual complexity and ideological consistency, based on a series of textual and doctrinal *auctoritates*, is proof of her status as a writer. The text we as readers have in our hands is a statement of its author's status as an author, but it is an implicit, passive self-fashioning (implicit and passive *qua* self-fashioning, that is) of the author as such.

There are two other instances in the text where the author refers to aspects of her being a woman of letters who pursues intellectual activities. In one she presents her interest in reading as a consequence of her disability. Being unable to receive advice from others due to her deafness, she instead turns to books and reading in search of such advice:

E porque mi pasyón es de tal calidat e tan porfiosa que tan poco me dexa oýr los buenos consejos como los malos, conviene sean tales los consejos consoladores que syn dar bozes a mi sorda oreja me pued[aln] poner en la claustra de sus graçiosos e santos consejos, para lo qual es neçesario de recorrer a los libros, los quales de arboledas saludables tienen en sy maravillosos enxertos. (f. 1v / p. 38)

Therefore, there is an intersection between these two aspects of Teresa de Cartagena's identity: according to her own admission, it is her disabled condition that pushes her towards the domain of the written word, as a reader in search of the advice that in other circumstances she would get aurally from friends, family, spiritual advisors, confessors, preachers, etc.

The final passage related to the learned, literate self of Teresa de Cartagena in the text is an isolated, casual and somewhat ambiguous reference in passing to her participation in learning activities at the University of Salamanca:

¡Ved qué onrra le podemos hazer que no sea suya! Esta por agora s'ofresçe a mi flaco poderío: mostrar por breves e synples razones cómo la pasçiençia mora en las virtudes ya dichas y ellas en ella; sy no como provar y mostrar se devía, ca a esto no bastaría mi flaco juyzio, mas segund la pequeña facultad de aquél y los pocos años que yo estude en el

estudio de Salamanca, los quales más me hazen dina de remisyón plenaria en la sinpleza de lo sobredicho que no me otorgan sabiduría en lo que dezir quiero. (f. 46v / p. 103)<sup>21</sup>

It is undoubtedly a remarkable statement, considering that the participation of women as students in higher education in Spain was extremely unusual, and would have ruffled some feathers in certain social sectors, even as late as in the early twentieth century. It is easy to imagine that the presence of women in university classrooms in the fifteenth century was almost unheard of. This is not the place to discuss this in detail, but what Cartagena says here is quite clear: she spend a number of years in the “estudio” (*studium* or university) in Salamanca, and what she writes in her book on the importance of Patience and the related virtues is the result of the workings of her own poor judgement (not labelled as *mugeril* this time) and of what she learned—we must infer—during the time she spent in the *studium universitatis Salmanticensis*.<sup>22</sup> This is a side of Teresa de Cartagena’s identity which, as already noted, is only mentioned in passing, but which is of the highest importance: not only was she a woman engaged in the spiritual readings and displaying the familiarity with the Scriptures that a conventual life could provide, but a woman who—certainly in an early stage of her life, before her deafness changed it—even participated in teaching activities at the University. And all this, I must highlight—because of what *Admiración operum Dei* would present us with later on—, without a hint of social trouble, without raised eyebrows or any negative reactions whatsoever at the sight of a woman writer who would attend university lessons. Quite a sensational achievement, which is mentioned, as previously noted, only in passing, not as a fundamental aspect of the identity of our author.

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**21** A philological assurance is required here: the quoted passage reproduces the MS reading. Hutton presents an important variant (*Arboleda*, ed. Hutton, 103): instead of “los pocos años que yo *estude* en el estudio de Salamanca” he prints “que yo *estudié*”, which is a misreading, though at the end of the day the error is almost irrelevant, given the context of the assertion (as I go on to discuss below).

**22** In all likelihood, she was not an “official student” (apologies for the anachronism), but rather attended lectures open to the wide public or those in charge by young *licenciados* trying to accumulate teaching experience with extracurricular lessons (“cátedras cursatorias”). Pedro M. Cátedra has suggested the possibility that Teresa de Cartagena studied “en, probablemente, un convento de clarisas de Salamanca e invoca la ciudad del Tormes por su condición de Estudio, y no precisamente porque hubiera podido acceder a él” (*Liturgia, poesía y teatro en la Edad Media*, Madrid, Gredos, 2005, 449). I further clarify the nature and extent of Teresa de Cartagena’s participation in teaching activities at University of Salamanca, and provide bibliography on the matter, in the section devoted to her biography in the introduction to *Arboleda*, ed. Conde.



We can finish this survey of the multi-layered self of Teresa de Cartagena as fashioned in *Arboleda de los enfermos* by approaching two of the elements that constituted her identity and that have no visibility whatsoever—in terms of explicit formulations or mentions, that is—in this work. Two elements that are inextricably related, since both share the same genealogical matrix: her condition of *conversa* and of member of the Santa María-Cartagena family. Neither appears mentioned in the text at any point.<sup>23</sup> Maybe for obvious reasons, one would think, associated to the troubled existence that Jews and *conversos* lived in fifteenth-century Castile; but maybe because our author did not consider them pertinent or relevant when she set pen to paper and compose *Arboleda de los enfermos*.

It is important, after all, to keep in mind that, firstly, all those close to Teresa de Cartagena would be very familiar with her family background, and, secondly, that *Arboleda de los enfermos* was a text originally intended by its author for a reduced readership, or bound anyway to be read by a small number of people, given the vital circumstances of its author, a nun in a cloistered convent.

### 3 *Admiración operum Dei*: a vindication of female literary authorship

As we have seen, *Arboleda de los enfermos* is eminently focused in one of the multiple layers that constitute the identity of Teresa de Cartagena, that of her as a disabled person. This work is centred on the problematic interaction of those suffering from illness or disability with society and the theological justification of illness and disability as a positive thing. Her second work, *Admiración operum Dei*, when approached as a textual projection of the multi-layered self of its author, presents a completely different situation.

To understand the transactional dynamics between the two works of Teresa de Cartagena it is essential to keep in mind that *Admiración* was written as a response to the reactions triggered by the dissemination of *Arboleda* among its reading public, and that the said reaction was not shaped by the subject of the

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<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, there are nondescript allusions to family life—in connection with illness—in the text, which I have cited above. Some scholars understand these to refer to the author's own family, but they make no explicit mention of it. A case in point is the following example: “E yo non sé para qué queremos los enfermos cosa deste mundo, ca bien que rodeemos no hallaremos en él cosa que bien nos quiera. Los plazerres que en él son del todo nos habo[r]rescen, la salut nos desanpara, los amigos nos olvidan, los parientes se enojan y aun la propia madre se enoja con la hija enferma y el padre abo[r]resce al hijo que con continuas dolencias le ocupare la posada” (f. 19r / p. 63).

latter, but rather by the gender of its author. Because of this, different aspects of the author's self are mobilised in the textual space, and a very different image of her identity is constructed in the text.

*Admiración operum Dei* was written in response to those who refused to believe that *Arboleda* could have been written by a woman, by nature incapable of such a feat. For this reason, the intellectual and the female sides of Cartagena's identity are brought to the fore in *Admiración*, precisely in response to these negative commentaries that she had to endure from those who knew about the existence of *Arboleda de los enfermos*. The disabled self of Teresa de Cartagena is therefore pushed out of the spotlight it enjoyed in *Arboleda* and moved into the shadows in *Admiración*. It does not disappear entirely from the text, but certainly takes a step back. In addition to this, in *Admiración*—as was the case in *Arboleda*—other facets of Cartagena's personal identity remain conspicuously absent from her textual self-fashioning: namely her status as a nun, her *judeoconverso* self and her family origins. We will examine in detail all this in the pages that follow.

### 3.1 Illness and disability, an inescapable side of Teresa de Cartagena's self

While the disabled self of Teresa de Cartagena is visible in the text of *Admiración operum Dei*, it is in a much less prominent way than it does feature in *Arboleda de los enfermos*, where, as we have seen, it plays a central role. Cartagena presents herself as a disabled person from the very beginning of the text of *Admiración*: the opening lines of the dedication to Juana de Mendoza, wife of Gómez Manrique, are as follows:

Acuérdome, virtuosa señora, que me ofrescí a escrevir a vuestra discreción; si he tanto tardado de lo encomendar a la obra no vos devéys maravillar, ca mucho es encojida la voluntat quando la dispusyón de la persona no conçierta con ella, antes aun la ynpide e contrasta. Sy considerades, virtuosa señora, las enfermedades e corporales pasyones que de contino he por familiares, bien conocerá vuestra discreción que mucho son estorvadoras de los movimientos de la voluntad e no menos turbadoras del entendimiento, el qual, fatigado e turbado con aquello que la memoria e natural sentimiento de presente le ofresçen, asý como costreñido de propia neçesydad, recoge en sý mesmo la deliberación de la voluntad con todos ynteriores movimientos. E tanto la detiene e detarda en la execuçión de la obra quanto vee que las sus fuerças ynteletuales son enflaqueçidas por causa de los ya dichos exteriores trabajos. (f. 50r / pp. 111–112)

In this opening paragraph Teresa de Cartagena fashions herself as a woman of letters (an aspect of her identity on which I will comment later) and combines this aspect of her identity with her condition as a disabled, ill person. Illness and

disability clash with her activities as a writer: illness affects her *voluntad*, her *entendimiento*, her *fuerças intelektuales*.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of this, she fulfils her promise, and writes. This activity will be cause for amazement among readers of her work, as she explicitly says in the introduction to *Admiración*:

Por el mismo respecto creo çiertamente que se ayan maravillado los prudentes varones del tractado que yo hize, y no porque en él se contenga cosa muy buena ni digna de admiración, mas porque mi propio ser e justo meresçimiento con la adversa fortuna e acrecentadas pasyones dan bozes contra mí, e llaman a todos que se maravillen diziendo: “¿Cómo en persona [en] que tantos males asyentan puede aver algund bien?” (f. 51r / p. 113)

In certain points of the text Cartagena reflects on the situation in which she finds herself, as a disabled woman who cannot make sense of herself or of the meaning and purpose of her illness, who cannot see what she has done to deserve it, and who ultimately sees herself as a sinner in danger, in what was probably an unprecedented exercise in Spanish literature of sincere self-introspection and self-analysis:

Él ynclinó su oreja a mí, que çercada [de] grandes angustias e puesta en el muy hondo piálago de males ynrepara[b]les le llamava con el Profeta diziendo: “Sálvame, Señor, ca entra el agua hasta el ánima mía.”<sup>25</sup> E verdaderamente agua de grand peligro entrava hasta el ánima mía, ca ni yo conosçía en estos mis males los beneficios de Dios ni tenía paçiencia ni aun sabía qué cosa era, e por çierto yo creo que mi entendimiento era estonçes aquel mesmo çiego qu'estava en el camino quando nuestro Redentor pasava çerca de Gericó.<sup>26</sup> (f. 61r / p. 131)

Here Cartagena refers to the times when she could not see that her illness was really a gift from God and when she did not have the patience required to suffer all the inconveniences that came with it. Patience is in fact the subject of the final section of *Arboleda*. This reflection brings us to a point in time previous to its composition, which chronicles this itinerary of discovery and salvation centred in the perception of the meaning and value of the disabled self in a theological,

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, this marks a stark contrast with what Teresa de Cartagena wrote at the beginning of *Arboleda de los enfermos*, where she says that her disability pushed her towards idleness, in order to avoid the dangers of which she decided to write *Arboleda* (see 2.1, above, and *Arboleda*, f. 1v–2v / pp. 38–39 / translation, pp. 24–25). In this case disability was the origin, albeit indirect, of writing; in the words from the dedication of *Admiración* it is an obstacle that prevents her from writing, with only limited success, as we see.

<sup>25</sup> Ps 68(69):2 “Salvum me fac, Deus, quoniam intraverunt aquae usque ad animam meam”.

<sup>26</sup> This is not a verbatim quotation, but it is easy to see in this passage the mark of Lc 18:35: “Factum est autem, cum appropinquaret Iericho, caecus quidam sedebat secus viam, mendicans”.

doctrinal context, with God—as she writes later in the text, in another passage in which she ponders about the importance of her illness for her salvation—being the “verdadero Médico de las ánimas” (f. 62r / p. 133).<sup>27</sup>

It is apt to close this survey of the self-fashioning of Teresa de Cartagena as a disabled person in *Admiración* with an important consideration: while the problematic intersection of disability with common, normal social interactions appeared prominently in different passages of *Arboleda*, this aspect is conspicuously absent from *Admiración*. In the latter text disability is treated in a rather matter-of-fact way, or, at most, as something that causes discomfort or internal turmoil in the disabled person, as the cited passages attest. It is clear that the textual relevance and meaning that the representation of disability and of the disabled self do have in each text respond to two clearly different textual strategies and purposes. The same thing happens with other aspects of the intersectional self-representation of Teresa de Cartagena: her female self and her identity as a woman of letters, as we are about to see.

### 3.2 Female self and literary authorship: a problematic intersectional entwinement

The first of the two paratextual entities that precede the text of *Admiración* presents Teresa de Cartagena as a writer in its very first words: “Acuérdome, virtuosa señora, que me ofrescí a escrevir a vuestra discreción...”; more specifically, she fashions herself there as an author who, because of her disabled condition, sees “la execución de la obra” delayed because her “fuerças yntelectuales son enflaquecidas por causa de los ya dichos exteriores trabajos” (f. 50r / pp. 111–12). This problematic intersection of two aspects of her identity is nevertheless not enough of an obstacle to prevent her from writing *Arboleda* and later *Admiración*. Similarly, the first words of the Introduction to *Admiración* refer to Cartagena’s identity as a writer. These first words situate the centre of interest of the work in the problematic intersection between Cartagena’s identity as a writer,

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<sup>27</sup> She expands on this later on in *Admiración*, revisiting topics already explored in *Arboleda*: “Pues el verdadero médyco, conociendo la calidad de mi dolencia espiritual para me guarescer de aquella, ¿qué hizo? Çerró las puertas de mis orejas, por donde la muerte entrava al ánima mía, e abrió los ojos de mi entendimiento, e vi e seguí al Salvador. Vi mis manos vazías de todos los humanos e vanos plazerres, e vi mis obras cargadas de angustiosas pasiones, vi la justicia del justo Juez que me hirió con su poderosa mano, e vi la misericordia del clementísimo Padre que me esperaba a penitencia, e seguí al Salvador” (f. 63v / p. 137).

her gender and the society in which the idea of a woman writer was not easily accepted:

Muchas vezes me es hecho entender, virtuosa señora, que algunos de los prudentes varones, e asý mesmo henbras discretas, se maravillan o han maravillado de un tratado que, la graçia divina administrando mi flaco mugeril entendimiento, mi mano escrivió. E como sea una obra pequeña, de poca sustança, estoy maravillada; e no se cre[e] que los prudentes varones se ynclinasen a quererse maravillar de tan poca cosa. (f. 50v / p. 113)<sup>28</sup>

Simply put, Teresa de Cartagena, a woman, characterised by her “flaco mugeril entendimiento”, has written a *tratado*, that is, a text with a considerable degree of intellectual and conceptual ambition and complexity, and this very fact has amazed and shocked those who read it or knew of its existence—men, surely, but also “henbras discretas”, as explicitly declared. Therefore, it is clear that the writing of *Admiración* springs from this problematic intersection of gender, literary authorship and social ideas, and that the aim of the work is to justify how and why female literary authorship should not be cause for surprise, shock or, as it has been the case with Teresa de Cartagena, even defamation.<sup>29</sup>

This is due to the fact that the surprise, wonder and amazement caused by the female authorship of *Arboleda* are not of the favourable kind, but, on the contrary, explicitly negative, as explained by our author in this same Introduction:

Pero sy su maravillar es çierto, bien paresçe que mi denuesto no es dubdoso, ca manifestó [es] no se faze esta admiración por mérito de la escritura, mas por defecto de la abtora o conponedora della, como vemos por esperençia quando alguna persona de synple e rudo entendimiento dize alguna palabra que nos paresca algund tanto sentida: maravillámonos dello no porque su dicho ni echo sea digno de admiración, mas porque el mismo ser de aquella persona es asý reprovado e baxo e tenido en tal estima que no esperamos della cosa que buena sea. (ff. 50v–51r / p. 113)

This defamation, or *denuesto*, is heightened by an additional consideration: that the fact that a woman is the author of a *tratado* is so unusual that it may lead to think that said treatise was not in fact written by the person who claims to have

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**28** I have approached the problematic adjustment of Teresa de Cartagena’s performance as a literary author and the social reactions it raised from a different point of view and using a different methodology in Conde (2013, 45–62).

**29** An excellent study of Teresa de Cartagena’s status as an author and her ideas about female authorship and gender in the context of the medieval mindset regarding women writers can be found in Baranda (2006), Gil-Albarells et. al. (eds.), (2006, 93–106). See also Rocío Quispe (1995, 85–101).

been its author, but rather by someone else—the implication being a male author, of course:

Pero ay otra cosa que [no] devo consyntir, pues la verdad non la consyente, ca paresce ser non solamente se maravillan los prudentes del tractado ya dicho, mas aún algunos no pueden creer que yo hizyese tanto bien ser verdad, que en mí menos es de lo que se presume; pero en la misericordia de Dios mayores bienes se hallan. (ff. 51r–51v / p. 114)

Teresa de Cartagena draws the line here: she will not accept that there are people who refuse to believe that *Arboleda* was not written by her.

Another element at the heart of the shocked reception of *Arboleda* is the fact that the author of the work is not only a woman, but also a disabled one. This is also referenced in the introduction

E por el mismo respecto creo ciertamente que se ayan maravillado los prudentes varones del tractado que yo hize, y no porque en él se contenga cosa muy buena ni digna de admiración, mas porque mi propio ser e justo merescimiento con la adversa fortuna e acrecentadas pasyones dan bozes contra mí, e llaman a todos que se maravillen diziendo: “¿Cómo en persona [en] que tantos males asyentan puede aver algund bien?” E de aquí se ha seguido que la obra mugeril e de poca sustancia que dina [es] de reprehensyón entre los onbres comunes con mucha razón sería fecha dina de admiración en el acatamiento de los singulares e grandes omnes, ca no syn causa se maravilla el prudente quando vehe que el nesçio sabe hablar. (f. 51r / p. 113)

While female gender and disability are intertwined at the core of these shocked reactions as they are described in this paragraph, the body of *Admiración* focuses on the justification of female literary authorship from a theological standpoint and develops that in detail.

Teresa de Cartagena organises the argumentative structure of her treatise around the idea of wonder (*admiración*): wonder as experienced by those who read *Arboleda de los enfermos* and found out that the text was written by a woman, a truly strange thing indeed and a reasonable cause of wonderment—for the Castilian late medieval mind, that is. The whole of *Admiración* is, as noted previously, a theological justification of female authorship. Its basic idea is this: all things that exist in the world come into being because that is God’s will. This axiom, applied to literary authorship and to the gender of literary authors, opens the door to the deconstruction of the wonder caused by the intersection of a female identity and literary authorship. To wonder at that would be a mistake, since a book written by a woman is like any other thing which is the result of God’s will, including a male-authored book. The wonderment should therefore be directed towards all things created by God equally, since all are the result of God’s will and God’s power:

Verdad es, muy discreta e amada señora, que todas las cosas que la onipotencia de Dios h[a] fecho [e] faze en el mundo son de grande admiración a nuestro humano seso, asý que la menor cosa que este soberano e potentísimo Hazedor ha fecho e faze no es de menor admiración que la mayor. Esto es porque la más chica cosa que en el mundo es tampoco se pudiera hallar como la mayor si la onipotencia de Dios no [la] hiziera. Pues sy todas las cosas, asý chicas como grandes, criadas e hechas por la onip[ot]encia [de] Dios son maravillosas e de grande admiración e todo lo que a Él p[ro]lug[o] e plaze ha hecho e haze e puede hazer en el çielo e en la tierra, ¿qué es la causa porque nos maravillamos más de unas c[o]sas que de otras? (f. 51v / p. 114)

It is, however, a known truth that some things in life cause more amazement than others. It is important to remember that the reason for this is not ontological, but phenomenological or, plainly, statistical; and that statistical evidence should not mistakenly lead us into thinking that there is an ontological reason behind the said amazement:

la causa de nuestro maravillar no es porque las obras hechas por la onip[ot]encia de Dios sean de menos admiración las unas que las otras, mas porque estas que cotidianamente vemos, avémoslas asý como por natural curso; e las que nunca o [r]aramente acaesçen causa[n] [en] nós admiración porque no son acostunbradas ni usadas en el mundo. Pero sy queremos elevar el entendimiento a contemplan o bien considerar las obras de Dios, fallaremos que no son menos maravillosas ni de menor admiración dinas éstas que por natural [c]urso vemos que cotidianamente pasan que las que [r]aramente e por grand distancia de tienpo acaesçen. (f. 52r / p. 115)

This is where Teresa de Cartagena inscribes the problematic question of female authorship and its theological justification: to her, it is not really a matter of women being less prepared to write than men, or of the social acceptability of women speaking their voice in literature, or, at the end of the day, of female authorship being unacceptable, condemnable or forbidden: it is, simply and plainly, God's will.

This, of course, does not open *Admiración* to an explicit feminist vindication or a proclamation of the equality between sexes (which would have been quite outlandish in fifteenth-century Western Europe), as the following passage points out:

Asý que, tornando al propósyto, creo yo, muy virtuosa señora, que la causa por que los varones se maravillan que muger aya hecho tractado es por no ser acostunbrado en el estado fimíneo, mas solamente en el varonil; ca los varones hazer libros e aprende[r] çiençias e usar dellas tiénenlo asý en uso de antiguo tienpo, que paresçe ser avido por natural curso e por esto ninguno se maravilla. E [en] las henbras, que no lo han avido en uso, ni aprende[n] çiençias ni tienen el entendimiento tan perfecto como los varones, es avido por maravilla. Pero non es mayor maravilla, ni a la onip[ot]encia de Dios menos fãçile

o ligero de hazer, lo uno que lo otro, ca el que pudo e puede enxerir las çiençias en el entendimiento de los onbres, [puede] sy quisiere enxerirlas en el entendimiento de las mugeres, aunque sea ynperfecto o no tan ábile ni sufiçiente para las reçeibir ni retener como el entendimiento de los varones Ca esta ynperfición e pequeña sufiçiençia pu[é]dela muy [bien] reparar la grand[eza] divina e aun quitarla del todo e dar pe[r]f[i]ción e abilidad en el entendimiento fimíne[o] asý como en el varonil, ca la sufiçiençia que han los varones no la an de suy[o], que Dios ge la dio e da. Onde el Apóstol dize: “No somos ydonios o sufiçientes de cogitar alguna cosa de nosotros asý como de nós mesmos, ma[s] la nuestra sufiçiençia de Dios es.”<sup>30</sup> Pues si la sufiçiençia de los varones de Dios es, e Dios la da a cada uno segund la medida del don suyo, ¿por qué razón desconfiaremos las henbras de lo tener en el tienpo oportuno e convenible como e quando Él sabe que [es] menester? (f. 52r-v / pp. 115–16)

Although this general principle about female inferiority, completely in line with the orthodox medieval thought about the interrelationship of genders, is firmly stated in the text, our author offers certain glimpses of exceptionality, cases where a degree of female pride infiltrates the gender social ideology of her times. She explains, with the help of a number of biblical and patristic authorities, how God created men as superior to women (“dio algunas preminencias al varón más que a la hembra”, f. 52v / p. 116), and how, according to the Genesis narrative, Eve was created as a helper for Adam. It is clear, she explains, that men are strong, and women are weak (see ff. 52v–53v / pp. 116–17), and that this is so for a reason. However, when she mentions the passage of Genesis where the status of women is defined, she makes an interesting point, appealing to reason:

De ser la henbra ayudadora del varón leémoslo en el Génesy, que después que Dios ovo formado el onbre 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 él.”<sup>31</sup> E bien se podría aquí argüir cuál es de mayor vigor, el ayudado o el ayudador: ya vedes lo que a esto responde la razón. (ff. 53v–54r / p. 118)

There is a hint of a refutation (and self-refutation, considering what she had written before) of the usual understanding of the balance between genders here, because the unspoken answer to the question she asks is transparent. However, she does not want to risk any accusations of heterodoxy, of subverting the hegemonic ideologies of gender firmly in place in the society in which she lives, as she hastens to add to the previous lines:

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**30** 2 Cor 3:5 “Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis quasi ex nobis: sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est.”

**31** Gen 2:18 “Dixit quoque Dominus Deus: Non est bonum esse hominem solum: faciamus ei adiutorium simile sibi.”



Mas porque estos argumentos e quistiones hazen a la arrogancia mundana e vana, e no aprovechan cosa a la devoçion e huyen mucho del propósito e final entencion mia, la qual no es, ni plega a Dios que sea, de ofender el estado superior e onorable de los prudentes varones, ni tanpoco favorecer al fimíneo, mas solamente loar la onipotencia e sabiduria e magnificencia de Dios, que asy en las henbras como en los varones puede yspirar e fazer obras de grande admiracion e magnificencia a loor y gloria del Santo Nonbre; aun sy quisyese que los animales brutos le loen con lengua fablante, bien lo puede hazer. (f. 54r / p. 118)

Here she comes back to her main line of reasoning, after lapsing into that tacit declaration of the questionability of men's superiority (which she labels as arrogant and hollow): all human works and creations, and all other things, of course, are the result of God's will. They are always inspired by God, and therefore can be made equally by men or women, as it is within God's power to inspire women, just as much as men, to create these works. Female authorship is surprising only statistically, since there are fewer women authors than men authors, and not by its own intrinsic nature. In other words, she comes back to a line of thought that dogmatically homologates her female authorship in a social context ideologically shaped by Christian orthodoxy.

In order to make her point about the capacity God has to enable women to perform the same feats as men, and even to outdo them, Cartagena chooses to use an example focused on the grounds of physical strength and braveness combined with cunningness: that of the history of Judith and Holofernes, as told in the biblical book of Judith. The story of a Hebrew woman able to kill and behead the powerful Babylonian general threatening her people is used to show that there are no limits to what women can achieve through God:

Bien sé que a esto dirán los varones que fue por espeçial gracia [e] yndustria que Dios quiso dar a la prudente Iudit, e yo así lo digo; pero segund esto bien paresçe que la yndustria e gracia soberana exceden a las fuerças naturales e varoniles, pues aquello que grant exército de onbres armados no pudier[o]n hazer, fizolo la yndustria e gracia de una sola muger. E la yndustria e gracia, ¿quién las ha por pequeñas preminencias syno quien no sabe qué cosas son? Ciertamente son dos cosas asy syngulares que a quien Dios dar las quiere, agora sea varón o sea henbra, maravillosas cosas entenderá e obrará con ellas, sy quisiere exerçitarse e no l[a]s encomendar [a] ociosidad y nigligncia. (f. 54v / p. 119)

If such a feat, requiring bravery, shrewdness and physical ability and strength, could be attained by a woman because of God's will, for him to make a woman write a treatise would certainly be a far easier task:

Pues sy Dios [no] negó al estado fimíneo gracia [e] yndustria para hazer cosas dificultosas que sobran a la fuerça de su natural condiçion, ¿cómo l[e]s negará la gracia suya para [que]

con ella o mediante ella sepan e puedan fazer alguna otra cosa que sea más fáçile o ligera de fazer al sexu fimíneo? Que manifiesto es que más a mano viene a la henbra ser eloquente que no ser fuerte, e más onesto le es ser entendida que no osada; e más ligera cosa le será usar de la péñola que del espada. Asý que deven notar los prudentes varones que Aquél que dio yndustria e graçia a ludit para fazer un tan maravilloso e famoso acto bien puede dar yndustria o entendimiento e graçia [a] otra qualquier henbra para fazer lo que otras mugeres, o por ventura algunos del estado varonil, no s[ab]rían. (f. 54v / pp. 119–20)

To round up the case for the social and dogmatical acceptability of female authorship, Teresa de Cartagena also points out that in the same way that God can instil into women the wisdom and the knowledge necessary for the composition of a literary or scientific work, he does exactly the same when men produce such works, since their talent to do so is not an innate ability:

Maravíllanse, o anse maravillado, algunas personas, e aun lo tienen por dubdoso e como ynposible que muger haga tractados ni entienda en hazer alguna obra sentida [ser] buena, e sy los varones hazen libros e compendiosos tractados no se maravillan, ca es atribuydo a su mesmo seso e suficiençia de entendimiento de aquél [que los] haze, e a las grandes e naturales çiençias que sabe; e nada refieren a gloria de Dios, ni creo que se acuerden dónde vinieron las naturales çiençias que los varones aprenden en los estudios, e los que las saben, dónde las ovieron e quién se las enseñó. Ca si bien lo considerasen, fallarían que los que agora son maestros en otro tienpo fueron diçípulos, e [a]quellos cuyos diçípulos fueron, otro maestro los mostró; e asý enseñando los unos a los otros e aprendiendo son venidas las çiençias a las manos de aquellos que agora las tienen e saben. Pero [si] bien hazen la pesquisa hallaremos que asý la sabiduría como la yndustria e graçia para la mostrar e aprender, todo desçendió e desçiende de u[n]a fue[n]te, ca el señor de las çiençias Dios solo es. (ff. 58r-v / pp. 126–27)

With this reasoning she aims, once again, to erase any gender-based motivations behind scientific production, or, in the case at hand, behind literary authorship. It is God's will that causes a man or a woman to write a book, not innate superiority. It is, she repeats constantly in *Admiración*, less usual for women to do so, hence the wonderment that some displayed when discovering a woman had written *Arboleda*, but the foundation for this wonderment is merely statistical; it is quantitative, not qualitative. With this perspective, the implication of what Teresa de Cartagena writes is very clear: the intersection of female gender and literary authorship should not raise any eyebrows—or at least, not for the reasons they seemed to be raised by those who read, or knew of the existence of, *Arboleda de los enfermos*. By way of conclusion, we can see that the problematic intersection of the female and the authorial selves of Teresa with the conventions of the society of her times is negotiated, sorted, and dismantled by appealing to the only authority that could have a higher power than social norms and conventions: theological principles and truths. Or, if the reader prefers, the grace or charity of God:

A lo qual respondo que es buena razón la ya dicha, ni yo digo [que] alguno por amar e servir a Dios ha de ser hecho súpitamente maestro en teología ni doctor en leyes ni bachiller en cánones, ni tan poco ha de esperar de ser ynbuýdo en las artes liberales; pero lo que yo digo e quiero dezir es esto: que la çiençia e sabiduría que Dios enseña e enseñará a qualquier varón o enbra que con amor e reverençia e humilldad viniere a su escuela es tal e de tal calidad como su ynconprehensible e perfecto saber sabe que a la salud de cada uno conviene, ca Dios es perfeta caridad. (f. 59r / p. 128)

Acknowledging this, and at the same time confirming it, Teresa de Cartagena declares the true origin and nature of her own status as a literary author in a passage that is perhaps *Admiración*'s most often quoted:

Maravállanse las gentes de lo que en el tractado escreví, 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 ove otro maestro, ni me consejé con otro algund letrado, ni lo trasladé de libros, como algunas personas con maliçiosa admiración suelen dezir; mas sola ésta es la verdad: que Dios de las çiençias, Señor de las virtudes, Padre de las misericordias, Dyos de toda consolación, el que nos consuela en toda tribulación nuestra, Él sólo me consoló, e Él sólo me enseñó, e Él sólo me leyó. (ff. 60v–61r / p. 131)

The aim of her argument is clear: anyone who would criticize her for daring to compose a *tratado*, or who would deny that she was really and truly its author, or, if we wish to adopt a wider perspective, anyone who would question, challenge, or dismiss the ability or the right that a female human being has to be an author or to carry out intellectual endeavours, would be denying or minimizing God's powers and essentially adopting an almost blasphemous stance. That is the spectacular gambit made by Teresa de Cartagena in *Admiración operum Dei*: to make the intersection of her female self with her authorial self socially acceptable to the society of her time. The fact that she had to write this work to make her point is solid proof of how problematic, if at all acceptable, was that intersection in late fifteenth-century Castile.

There are other instances in *Admiración* where the female self of Teresa de Cartagena comes to the fore that are not associated with the issue of female authorship. Similar to what we saw in *Arboleda*, there are in the text a number of references to the author's "mugeril ingenio", "mugeril entendimiento" or "obra mugeril".<sup>32</sup> As I said in the case of *Arboleda* (see 2.2, above), they cannot be

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<sup>32</sup> The occurrences in *Admiración* are: "Pues qué hará el entendimiento flaco e mugeril desde se vehe puesto entre tantos e tan peligrosos lazos?" (f. 50r / p. 112); "un tratado que, la graçia divina administrando mi flaco mugeril entendimiento, mi mano escrivió" (f. 50v / p. 113); "E de aquí se ha seguido que la obra mugeril e de poca sustança que dina [es] de reprehensyón entre los onbres

completely dissociated from the rhetorical *topoi* of self-deprecation or modesty. It is clear, however, that in the context of a work where gender as identity and the legitimation of female literary authorship are the main and almost only themes, these proclamations of intellectual inferiority have a very different ring to them, and cause a more perceptible sense of discomfort.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.3 Other sides of the multi-layered self of Teresa de Cartagena in *Admiración*

In section 2.3 of this article the revision of the self-fashioning that Teresa de Cartagena constructs in *Arboleda de los enfermos* allowed us to see the different degrees to which three other sides of the author's self are represented in the text. There is no explicit textual fashioning of Cartagena as a nun in *Admiración*. It is true that the rubric that precedes *Admiración* in the MS refers to Teresa de Cartagena as a nun:

Aquí comienza un breve tractado el qual conuinientemente se puede llamar *Admiración operum Dey*; compúsole Teresa de Cartajena, religiosa de la horden de a petición [sic] e ruego de la señora doña Juana de Mendoça, muger del señor Gómez Manrique (f. 50r / p. 111)

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comunes con mucha razón sería fecha dina de admiración en el acatamiento de los singulares e grandes omnes" (f. 51r / p. 113); "E por estas razones e por otras mejores e más suficientes, las quales mi angosta capacídad e mugeril entendimiento non pueden conprehender ni sentir, creo çiertamente que los bienes de gracia son mayores e más syngulares que non los de natura e fortuna" (f. 57r / p. 124); "aquello que a mi entendimiento mugeril se fazia escuro e dificultoso púdolo fazer claro e ligero Aquél que es verdadera luz e sol de justiça" (f. 60r / p. 129); "que vea yo luz por la qual la mi tenebrosa e mugeril ynorancia sea alunbrada de los rayos de la tu muy alta prudencia" (f. 62r / p. 133); "E manifestar a Dios e[s] acatar con diligencia devota la grandeza de sus beneficios e misericordias e gracias, [e] manifestarlas a las gentes recontándolo a gloria e a manificencia del su santo Nonbre, lo qual yo, aunque con poca devoçion e menos prudencia, pero segund la mi mugeril e pequeña suficiencia, hize" (f. 64r / pp. 137–38). I have previously examined the existence of these or similar expressions in *Arboleda*, halfway between the rhetorical modesty *topos* and a self-conscious, explicit gender marker (see 2.2, above).

33 Less important for my purpose here is the passage in *Admiración* that offers a description of the life of a certain kind of woman, one of those "mugeres communes que salen de su casa mucho a menudo e andan vagando por c[a]sas ajenas" (f. 64v / p. 138). This serves as the material term in a metaphorical comparison with a situation in which understanding is not focused in its right target, which is "el studio ynterior de la secreta cogitacion dentro de las paredes del coracon" (f. 64v / p. 138), and instead wanders aimlessly and gets involved in "negociaciones mundanas" (f. 64v / p. 138). The construction of the metaphor brings with it a little *costumbrista* vignette of a very specific form of female life and behaviour in medieval Castile, reminding some of the most quoted and celebrated passages of Alfonso Martínez de Toledo's *Arcipreste de Talavera*.

Here it is important to note two things. The first is the omission in the rubric of the name of the religious order to which Teresa de Cartagena belonged. We know she was first a nun in the Franciscan order of Poor Clares in the convent of Santa Clara in Burgos, and later in the Cistercian convent of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas in the same city.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, we must note the fact that in all likelihood this rubric was the work not of the author, but of a copyist, and that therefore it is sensible not to consider it an authorial declaration of identity as a nun.

However, and as stated in the exploration of this layer of Cartagena's self-identity in *Arboleda*, we can obviously see the religious tone and ideology that inform *Admiración*; the network of religious references and authorities upon which the text relies for its production of meaning; the clerical culture and knowledge behind the author's pen; and even the rhetorical and argumentative design of the whole of the text, decisively shaped by the prescriptions of the *artes concionandi*. Furthermore, the density of mentions and quotations from authoritative texts is higher in *Admiración* than in *Arboleda*; not only of and from the Bible, but especially from texts by ecclesiastical authors such as St Augustine, St Gregory the Great, or from Christian liturgy. In this text here is also a more intense use of rhetorical devices. These features, perhaps associated with the more forceful, polemic tone of *Admiración* as compared to *Arboleda*, are the signs of a well-educated, well-read person, with a strong religious, ecclesiastical background. However, and as previously stated, these cannot necessarily be seen as features univocally identifiable with the identity of the author as a nun—once again, she does not explicitly fashion herself in the text as one. Furthermore, this side of the author's identity, however implicit or elliptic its presence in *Admiración*, does not appear in the text as potentially problematic when intersected with any other social factors or elements.

Finally, the other two aspects of Teresa de Cartagena's identity that we examined in *Arboleda*—member of the Cartagena family and *conversa*—yield the same results when scrutinized in *Admiración*: there are no elements in the text susceptible to being seen as instances of explicit fashioning of the author of the text as one or the other.

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<sup>34</sup> See Seidenspinner-Núñez / Kim (2004, 123–36), and the first chapter of the introduction to *Arboleda*, ed. Conde, where important new documentary evidence is adduced.

## 4 By way of conclusion: the works of Teresa de Cartagena as an exercise of intersectional self-fashioning

It is my hope that these pages have shown the usefulness that intersectionality as an analytical methodology can have for literary sociology in particular, and for a more nuanced scrutiny of certain aspects of literary analysis in general. Intersectionality allows for a complex, multidimensional analysis of the different layers and aspects of an author (or a character) as represented in a literary text, and for a more comprehensive, more sophisticated examination of these aspects of the author's personality in their complex, often conflictive, interaction with different social actors, ideological entities, schemes of authority or hegemonic social constructions. The case of the author approached in this study, the Castilian fifteenth-century woman writer, Teresa de Cartagena, and of her two works, *Arboleda de los enfermos* and *Admiración operum Dei*, shows, I think, how well suited the intersectional approach is for the exploration and scrutiny of how an author with a complex, multi-layered personal identity—a woman, a disabled person, a nun, an author, a woman of letters, a *conversa*, a member of a well-known and powerful family—fashions herself in the text she wrote, and how and in which ways this self-fashioning is mainly defined and configured by the intersection of these different layers of her personal identity with the social reality and the hegemonic ideology of the society in which she lived and wrote in a process that decisively shaped her literary voice and her literary production. Intersectionality is not, of course, the only way to cogently analyse these social and personal features, these processes of self-fashioning, and their mutual problematic intersections, but it certainly provides a conceptual framework in which such analysis can be done with a satisfactory degree of conceptual articulation and of methodological self-consciousness.

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