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Literature and visual culture



6

COURT AND CONVENT

Senses and spirituality in Hispanic medieval women's writing

Lesley K. Twomey

Vision is the principal sense for medieval people for, through *theoria*, the gaze, it led to knowledge.¹ Christianity based its evangelism on visual testimony, since the disciples saw the risen Christ and the Gospels record their oral testimony. By the late Middle Ages, rituals of seeing (Lentes 2006) reveal a taste for public and private devotions prioritizing the gaze, whether exposition of the Blessed Sacrament or personal devotion to a religious artefact. Seeing something holy with the physical eye or seeing Christ through contemplation in the mind's eye imprint holiness on the seer: "To see was to become similar to the object" (Bierhoff 2002, 137; Beresford and Twomey 2013, 103–132). In this chapter, I explore Hildegard of Bingen's theology of the senses, particularly seeing and hearing, aiming to assess seeing and hearing in women's writing.² Conventual writers include Teresa de Cartagena (1420/25– ?), who wrote two treatises, one on infirmity and one justifying her writing; Constanza de Castilla (†1478), a Dominican prioress, who wrote liturgy and prayers; and Isabel de Villena (1430–1490), a Franciscan abbess, who wrote a life of Mary and Christ.³ All are noblewomen: Teresa de Cartagena is from an "upwardly mobile" *converso* family (Seidenspinner-Núñez and Kim 2004, 132), whilst Constanza and Villena had royal blood. I also consider Leonor López de Córdoba's *Memorias*, a treatise justifying her own family's status.

Seeing and authority

Hildegard begins her *Scivias* with a vision of the heavens, whence a divine voice, addressing her as a universal figure, orders her to write: "O homo fragilis, et cinis cineris, et pudredo putredinis, dic et scribe quae vides et audis [O fragile human, ash of ashes and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear]."⁴ Seeing and hearing lie, therefore, at the heart of *Scivias*. Many women, particularly those from the lower classes, employed mystical vision for the authority to write (Surtz 1995, 19). María de Ajofrín (†1489) recounts her visions to Juan de Corrales, her confessor, who records them (Surtz 1995, 68–84). Similarly, in the early 1500s, the Dominican nun, María de Santo Domingo, narrates her *Revelaciones*, serving as mouthpiece for the crucified Christ (Sanmartín Bastida and Luengo Balbás 2014, citing Mazzoni 2005, 52).

Villena also begins her *Vita Christi* with a vision, the Conception of Mary in the mind of God, although she does not use it to justify writing. López de Córdoba narrates a vision,

presented as God's response to prayer, enabling the writer to fashion her own identity. She claims she was vouchsafed the vision, seeing an archway and entering to pick flowers:

E otro día que no quedaua mas que un día de acuar mi orazi3n, s3auado, soñaua pasando por San Yp3lito tocando el alua: bi en la pared de los corrales un arco mui grande e mui alto, e que entraua io por all3 y coxi3 flores de la Sierra y ue3a mui gran zielo. Y, en esto, despert3; e obe esperanza en la Virgen Santa Mar3a, que me dar3a cassa.

(3r-v)

Unlike Hildegard's visions, which are waking visions, Leonor's writes: "*despert3*." The vision, nevertheless, gives her confidence that Mary will give her what she requests, a house for her family. After wandering homeless, she sees a dwelling, symbolizing the restoration of her family's fortunes. It is, however, in religious terms rather self-serving.

Hearing: an author's words made public

For L3pez de C3rdoba, hearing is the most natural way of engaging with a written text, disseminating her own words to others: "Y el dolor que a mi coraz3n lleg3, bien lo pod3is entender quien esta historia oi3re" (L3pez de C3rdoba fol. 4r). She repeats how the *Memorias* are read aloud: "y por que quien lo oi3re sepan la relaci3n de todos mis hechos, e milagros que la Virgen Santa Mar3a me mostr3" (fol. 1r). She has written (escr3uolo) her story to serve as a model to others:

Y escr3uolo a honrra y alabanza de mi se3or Jesuchristo e de la Virgen Santa Mar3a, su madre que lo pari3, por que todas las criaturas que estubieren en tribulazi3n sean ziertas que yo espero en su misericordia que, si se encomiendan de coraz3n a la Virgen Santa Mar3a, que Ella las consolar3 y acorrer3 como consol3 a m3.

(L3pez de C3rdoba fol. 1r)

Yet, a few lines later, she indicates that she had it written: "Y mandelo escreuir ass3 como vedes" (L3pez de C3rdoba, fol. 1r). Her *Memorias* is given physicality in "vedes," whilst its words are repeated: "oi3re." The *Memorias*' words are to bring spiritual consolation to all who hear them, assuring them that Mary will bring consolation, "consolar3," as she has to the writer.

The ear and the eye of the soul: Hildegard's *Scivias* and Villena's *Vita Christi*

Hildegard differentiates between the inner and outer senses (Emerson 1998, 73), as many medieval authors do. She receives her visions with the mind's eyes and ears: "auribus interioris hominis," the mysterious sixth sense:

Visiones vero quas vidi: non eas in somnis, nec dormiens, nec in phrenesi, nec corporeis oculis aut auribus exterioris hominis, nec in abditis locis percepi, sed eas vigilans, circumspeciens in pura menteoculis et auribus interioris hominis, in apertis locis secundum voluntatem Dei accepi.

(PL 197, col. 385)

[“But the visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places as God willed it.”]

(Hart and Bishop 1990, 60)

She shows her awareness of the nature of dreams and rejects even the highest categories of dream vision in favour of a waking vision mediated by the inner eye and ear. When Villena distinguishes between the inner eye and the eyes of the body, she uses them purposefully. For example, they aid in distinguishing the consecrated body of Christ with its outer elements and its inner reality in the chapter “Com se deu tractar e rebre aquest excel·lent sacrament del cors preciós de Jesus Senyor Nostre.” In this way, Isabel de Villena refers to the delights which are unimaginable, having never been seen by the eye nor heard by the ear: “Ço és: ‘l’ull no ha vist, ne orella hoït, ne cor de home poria jamés comprendre los delits que lo Senyor comunica a aquells que verdaderament l’amen’” (Villena 1916, II, 248, henceforth II, 248). In a similar manner, when she focuses on the Virgin Mary’s adoration of the Host, after the Resurrection of Christ, she indicates that the Virgin gazes on the Host with “los ulls de l’ànima.”

e dreçant-se, mirava de fit ab los ulls corporals, a ab los ulls de l’ànima vey a contemplava dins aquella lo fill de Déu y seu, lo qual ella havia concebut e tengut dins les entràmens sues, e que per mijà de aquell sacrament havia a tornar en sa posada e cubert hon nou mesos era stat. E, levada en pensar aquesta alta e meravellosa obra, posada en èxtasi dins la sua ànima, pujava la altea del cel, super cherubin et seraphin.

(III, 305)

The eyes of the Virgin’s soul are able to distinguish within the Host, displayed for her, the flesh and blood human body of Christ, who had been inside her womb. Performing a eucharistic ritual for the Virgin’s eyes contributes to the “sacramental institutionalization of grace” (Beckwith 1993, 110), enabling Villena to develop understanding of transubstantiation. It also emphasizes Schaulust, a desire to see the Host but also to see through or see beyond it (Bynum 2006, 232). Discerning this eucharistic mystery leads the Virgin to “èxtasi” (III, 305).

Villena then uses “ulls de l’ànima” for a Resurrection experience. After being raised from the dead, Lazarus pleads with Christ on account of the long bondage in which humankind has been held. Lazarus, returning from limbo, speaks about what he saw with the eye of his soul: “qui ab los propis ulls de l’ànima la he vista” (II, 156).

Villena is also aware how God regards humanity. God is omniscient as his gaze manifests: “totes coses son clares e manifestes als ulls de sa clemència” (II, 231). This divine gaze occurs just before Christ washes the feet of his disciples and immediately before he singles out Judas as his betrayer. For Villena, God’s gaze may judge. The Virgin reveals this, as she teaches the disciples before Pentecost, using words of penitence: “Creau en mi un cor monde e net e deliure de tota culpa que als ulls de vostra majestat pugua offendre” (III, 285). Other *Vitae Christi* do not mention God’s gaze. Psalm 51.10 does not either:

God, create in me a clean heart,
Renew within me a resolute spirit
Do not thrust me away from your presence.

Villena writes about eyes on more than a hundred occasions in the *Vita Christi*. These are penitent eyes awash with tears, as well as eyes which bear witness: “ab propis ulls” (ten occasions), eyes which are raised to heaven, seeking heavenly guidance, rather than gazing on the things of the earth. On thirty-one occasions, eyes are raised, to heaven, to God the Father, or to Christ crucified. Eyes are lowered in shame and penitence (nine occasions). God’s gaze brings penitential tears to St Peter in the courtyard: “O quin mirar fon aquest de tanta dolçor e pietat que travessà les entràmenes del dexeble, veent-se axí cridat e venia a misericòrdia per aquell qui negat havia” (II, 297). Constanza de Castilla also emphasizes seeing the incarnate Lord, where seeing becomes receiving. She sets her prayer in the context of Simeon’s desire to see the Lord: “e desde que te vido, con grant reverencia, alegría, et devoción te recibí, diciendo: Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace” (Constanza de Castilla 1998, 5). Her prayer is his. Villena emphasizes “per revelació divina” which encourages him to enter the Temple and bear witness: “que aquell Senyor que vos desijau és a la porta del temple e ara lo veureu ab los propis ulls” (I, 306).

The senses: knowing God

For Hildegard, the senses are not mere bodily functions but connect to “reason and powers of the soul” (Emerson 1998, 86). She “values them and assigns them a role in acquiring knowledge” (Emerson 1998, 83):

Et altitudo ejus est quinque cubitorum; qui est Excellentia divinarum scientiarum in Scripturis quae propter opus Dei sunt in quinque sensibus qui sunt in homine; quos inspiravit Spiritus Sanctus ad utilitatem hominum, quia homo cum quinque sensibus suis respicit ad altitudinem divinitatis, discernens unumquodque, bonum scilicet et malum. (Scivias, Book III, Vision II, PL 197, col. 852) [“The wall is five cubits high, which refers to the virtue of divine knowledge of the Scriptures, which imbue Man’s five senses for the sake of the work of God. The Holy Spirit breathed on them for people’s good; for with the five senses people can regard the height of Divinity, and discern both good and evil.”]

(Hart and Bishop 1990, 336).

The Devil may seduce the senses. They can, however, be cleansed and operate properly:

Lex ad salutem hominis posita est, et prophetae occulta Dei manifestant: sic et sensus hominis quaeque nociva ab homine depellit et interiora animae denudat. Nam anima sensum spirat. Quomodo? Ipsa hominem vivente facie vivificat, et visu, auditu, gustu, et tactu dotat. Ita quod homo sensu tactus, pervigil in omnibus rebus sit; sensus enim signum omnium virium animae est, sicut et corpus vas animae est. Quomodo? Sensus omnes vires animae claudit. Quid hoc? Homo in facie cognoscitur, oculis videt, auribus audit, os ad loquendum aperit, minibus palpat, pedibus ambulat, at ideo sensus in homine est velut lapides pretiosi, et ut pretiosus thesaurus in vase signatus. Sed ut vas videtur, et thesaurus in eo scitur; ita enim in sensu caeterae vires animae intelliguntur. (Scivias, Book I, Vision IV, PL 197, col. 427–428) [The Law is ordained for human salvation, and the prophets show forth the hidden things of God; so all human senses protect a person from harmful things and lay bare the soul’s interior. For the soul emanates the senses. How? It vivifies a person’s face and glorifies him with sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, so that by this touch he becomes watchful

in all things. For the senses are the sign of all the powers of the soul, as the body is the vessel of the soul. What does this mean? A person is recognized by his face, sees with his ears, opens his mouth to speak, feels with his hands, walks with his feet; and so the senses are to a person as precious stones and as a rich treasure sealed in a vase. But as the treasure within is known when the vase is seen, so also the powers of the soul are inferred by the senses.

(Hart and Bishop 1990, 123)

The senses are also treasure in the vessel, *vas*, of the body. Humans regard (*respicit*) the height of Divinity, discerning good and evil. Hildegard's positive approach to the senses is at variance with their interpretation in medieval moralizing literature and sermons, where they are seen as "dangerous gateways to the vices" (Nordenfalk 1985, 2).⁵ Teresa de Cartagena's view of the senses is akin to this. Her spiritual experience centres on the silence she experienced in her convent and more particularly in her cell. On numerous occasions, she writes of how the sounds of the world distract her and prevent her from hearing God's word:

Ya es puesto silencio 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 decir del todo apartarme de las hablas mundanas y de sus deseos [. . .]. Ca esto solo seria asaz ruydo para que no pudiese entender las bozes; [. . .].

(1967, 43)

In Teresa's Arboleda, the voices of the world are a din, a distraction, and worthless chatter preventing her from discerning what is good. This she indicates through lexical choices such as "palabrear," "ruido," "conversaciones del syglo," or "por mucho que el razonador baladre" (1967, 40, 43). According to Covarrubias Horozco (2006, 278), "baladrón" is "El fanfarrón, hablador, vocinglero, rufián, cobarde, que tiene palabras y no manos," and "baladrar" gives a good indication of the deceptive nature of human conversation:

E asý yo estando enbuelta en el tropel de las fablas mundanas e bien rebuelto e atado mi entendimiento en el cuydado de aquéllos no podia oýr las bozes de la santa Escritura que nos enseña e amonesta.

(1967, 40)

Such a view of human conversation is not unusual. Constanza de Castilla also regards human conversation as more likely to lead astray than to save:

Señor, por mí tu esclava, *solus et anxiatu*s en el monte Oliveti tanto constreñido fuese, yo te suplico, así como tú eres vida perpetua, me des graçia que desee morir por tu amor e me arriedre de las conversaciones dañosas a mi anima e de los negoçios del mundo en que yo me ocupo, como tiraste a sannt Pablo de perseguir tus cristianos.

(Constanza de Castilla 1998, 8).

Teresa de Cartagena's imagery of "disordering" (tangling and binding) goes further, for she delivers a picture of how physical hearing prevents the soul from discerning and acquiring knowledge. It is generally believed that Teresa, after going deaf, writes the Arboleda as a means of self-consolation, whilst her very disability impelled her towards writing (Deyermund

1976–1977, 22, 29). Writing was transformative for her (Seidensspinner-Núñez and Kim 2004, 123). Deafness, and disability, have been thought to have “exacerbated her loneliness” (Seidensspinner-Núñez 1997, 9), to have created a space for writing (Cammarata 2000), to have deepened her “concienciación de su diferencia frente al ‘otro,’ es decir frente al conjunto de la sociedad” (Muñoz Pérez 2012, 699), to be the centrepoint of the autobiographical writing she creates (Juárez 2002), and to have led her to create her own salvation in direct partnership with God (Trillia 2007). At the start of the Arboleda, Teresa praises God for stopping the ears of her body, referring to the “claustra de sus santos e graçiosos consejos” (1967, 38), blocking out the sounds around her, because incessant chatter prevented her from hearing God. Later, Teresa affirms that the ear of understanding must strain to hear him:

Y con el silencio ya dicho, ynclinando la oreja de mi entendimiento, pues la del cuerpo mal me ajuda, parésceme que oý resonar a aquestas palabras: “Oye, hija, e acata e ynclina tu oreja, oluida el pueblo tuyo y la casa de tu padre.”

(1967, 44)

Villena, on the other hand, only occasionally refers to the ear as a principal source of sinful messages. For her, too, the ear can lead astray. Part of the torment of Christ, when he is bound to the column, is the lies and vile words flung at him – which he bears with patience: “E a la porta foren star x saigs, qui ab continues vilanies, escarns e vituperis turmentaren les sues sagrades orelles hoint tanta viltat” (II, 305). Christ endures the jibes without retorting. The implication of this torment is that words were more than sticks and stones but could penetrate into the soul and have a negative effect on it. In Villena’s *Vita Christi*, however, the ear can also be a means of conveying secret messages for good or supportive advice. The Virgin goes to the aid of those who are being led astray by what they hear: “e mudaran la vida sua de vicis en virtuts per la intercessió de vostra senyoria, qui continuament los direu a la orella [. . .]” (I, 196). The Virgin intercedes, turning vice into virtue through words “a la orella.” Yet even the message whispered focuses on seeing bad examples, and this leads to those bad examples being interiorized:

Fills meus: si us voleu ben despullar dels vicis que acostumat haveu, fugiu a totes aquelles companies que mal exemple de vida vos poden donar, ca lo veure fer mal mou la persona a desig de fer semblant

(I, 196)

For Villena, seeing evil – as well as hearing wrong things – was a source of distraction for the soul.

The word in the ear of good counsel is a trait which Villena uses six times in the *Vita Christi*, and I could not help but see the whispered word as a feature both of court and convent. The three-year-old Virgin, handed over by St Anne to live in the temple, receives words of encouragement, as she climbs the steps of the temple. She hears she is to pray for human nature from Charity, her handmaid: “dix-li a la orella Senyora, recort-se vostra mercé en aquest pujament de pregar estretament per natura humana” (I, 33); her handmaid “Pietat” counsels her: “Continau” (I, 36). She speaks in the ear of her son at the wedding at Cana, making the first request to launch Christ’s public ministry: “e sa senyoria moguda de molta pietat, acostà:se a la orella del amat fill seu” (II, 75). The intimate word in the ear of Mary Magdalene by her sister, Martha, advises her that the Lord is calling her. Villena uses the same words as at Cana, “acostant-se a la orella” (II, 151). It echoes Christ’s call. It marks closeness, between sisters, and, earlier, between mother and son. In the Gospel (John 11:28), Martha speaks to her sister in a low voice.

Witness is particularly important in the *Vita Christi*. At the death of Christ, the Virgin asserts she has physically witnessed his sorrows, *a ull*. Seeing has enabled the Virgin to imbibe the sorrows but she has not been able to touch Christ or bring him comfort:

Jornada és aquesta per a ésser largamente recordada per mi, dolorosa mare, qui *a ull* he vist totes les dolors e penes del meu fill tan amat, e, tenant-lo tan prop en la sua mort, de una set d'aygua no'l he pogut confortar, ne ara, mort, no'l puch tocar!

(III, 65–66)

Seeing can also be a means of spiritual communication in the *Vita Christi*: “e miraven-se mare e fill, parlant més de ulls que de boca” (II, 200). Yet the physical eyes and seeing physically are also valuable. For example, the Virgin expresses her longing to see her baby son about to be born, “desijant-li veure,” and this time with the eyes of the body, “ab los ulls corporals” specified:

E encesa en la sobirana amor del seu Fill, desijant-lo veure ab los ulls corporals, parlava-li ab sobirana dolçor e deya: O pulcherrimum et dulcissimum Dominum meum, ex toto corde meo te desydero: veni mihi: videam te speciosissime per filiis hominum quia amore langueo et te videre desiderio.

(I, 268)

Both Villena and Teresa de Cartagena seem aware of St Augustine's distinction between three categories of seeing: corporeal vision, which distinguishes the outward form; spiritual vision, which sees an interior image; and, finally, the eyes of the intellect, or the direct perception of unchanging truth (McGinn 2006, 187). This eye is what Teresa calls the intellectual eyes of the soul. However, hearing with the ear of the soul or the interior ear is magnified in importance, as we might expect, in Teresa's writing. Teresa frequently writes of hearing, as expected because of the infirmity from which she suffered, particularly in her *Arboleda*, yet it is in her *Admiración Operum Dei* where she considers how eyes bring people to understanding (see Howe 1996). In *Admiración*, Teresa recaps how God blocked her ears to release her from the world's sounds: “Çerró las puertas de mis orejas por donde la muerte entrava al ánima mía” (1967, 137), yet, conversely, he opened the eyes of her understanding: “e abrió los ojos de mi entendimiento e vi e seguí al Salvador” (1967, 137). Teresa considers that the ears of the soul distinguish true knowledge from the word of God. Just as the ears can be blocked by incessant chatter, the dust of sinful desires obscures the eyes:

¿E pues cómo se puede apartar del mal el que aun no conosçe el verdadero bien, el qual no se puede ver con los ojos corporals mas con los ynteletuales del alma? E si estos por nuestros pecados se obscuresçen e çiegan con el poluo de las terrenales pecados, en tinieblas estamos.

(1967, 136)

The senses lead humankind astray, preventing sight. The senses blind the discerning mind's eye, whilst the darkness of lifestyle leads humans away from the light and deeper into darkness, whether of sin or separation from God:

E desta manera e por causa de los sentidos se çiegan los ojos del entendimiento, ca çiego se puede decir el entendimiento de aquel que vehe la luz accidental del curso

del día e no vehe ni considere las tinieblas de la noche por su escuro beuir las quales le apartan de la Luz verdadera e le lleuan por pasos contados a la eternal tiniebla.
(1967, 135)

She shows how corporeal eyes provide information for the eye of intellect, the “mind’s eye.” The eye of the body fails “por su escuro beuir” (1967, 135). The *Admiración* ends on defence of Arboleda. Teresa interprets the blind man cured by Christ on the road to Jericho as a metaphor for her intellect:

E como mi çiego entendimiento sintió por las señales ya dichas qu’el Salvador venía, luego començó a dar secretas boces diziendo: “Ave merçed de mí, Fijo de David.” E los que ivan e venían increpavan a este ya dicho çiego entendimiento mío que callase. E sin duda puedo dezir que ivan e venían muchos desvariados cuidados e gran turbamulta de respetos temporales humanos, de los quales mi entendimiento era increpado e aun costreñido a callar, ca como yo estava en el camino çerca de Jericó, que se entiende puesto todo mi cuidado en la calle d’esto mundo, e más çerca mi deseo de las afeçiones humanas que de las espirituales, no era maravilla si los pensamientos que ivan y venían e pasavan por mi entendimiento eran vezinos de Gericó, conviene a saber, más familiars del siglo que no de la religión cuyo nombre usurpava por estonçes. Así que estos ya dichos pensamientos e movimientos umanos increpavan a mi çiego entendimiento que callase, mas él, con el grand deseo que tenia de ver luz, más y más multiplicava sus secretas boces diziendo: “Ave merçed de mí, Hijo de David.”
(1967, 132)

Surtz (1995, 35) argues this is an allegory of how Teresa was cured, enabled to see the light, and, therefore, empowered to write. Nevertheless, she subordinates the blind man’s desire to see to hearing, first the jibes of passersby, who are “del siglo,” and, then, the words of Christ. Whilst the cacophony distracts the blind man-entendimiento, his “secretas boces” importune Christ. He pursues the “light” of knowledge, desiring to see. Seeing is the ultimate goal, facilitated by hearing. The way Teresa presents the man surrounded by denigrating voices recalls Villena’s words about Christ at the Passion. Teresa, in the guise of the blind man, becomes a Christ-like figure, surrounded by voices calling insults and vile words. *Imitatio Christi* occurs in Margery Kempe’s writing where she becomes an “object of scorn” for others (Beckwith 1993, 82). Teresa emphasizes this near the end of *Admiración*, when her suffering steps become those of Christ’s “cruz de la pasión:”

E quando escreví aquel tractado que trata de aquesta intelectual Luz e sobredicha çiençia, la qual es alabança e conocer a Dios e a mí misma e negar mi voluntad e conformarme con la voluntad suya, e tomar la cruz de la pasión que padesco en las manos del entendimiento interior, e ir en pos del Salvador por pasos de af[ic]ción espiritual, e manificar a Dios por confisión de la lengua, dando loor e alabança al su santo Nonbre, recontando a las gentes la igualanza de la su justiçia,[de] la grandeza de su misericordia, e la manifiçençia e gloria suya.
(1967, 138)

In this part of the text Teresa visualizes herself following Christ and leaping and praising God just as the blind man had. Teresa’s text is one of the few occasions on which there is a sense of a woman gazing upon her own salvation.

The female gaze

In medieval love poetry, the beloved woman is generally the object of the male lover's gaze but, very occasionally, a female poet gazes upon something and recounts that gaze:

Una cosa que desseo
Trabajo por alcançar,
péssame quando la veo
y más quando la posseo:
¿de do nasce este pesar?

("Dama," lines 51–55, cited in Deyermond 1978,
1995; Mirrer 1995; Sanmartín Bastida 2007, 40;
Snow 1984; Weissberger 2001)

The "dama," directing her question to Diego Nuñez, reflects on longing, looking, striving, and on how possessing a desired object renders it worthless.

Similarly, when Florencia Pinar gazes on caged birds, she sees in them an allegory of suffering and imprisonment:

Destas aves su nación
es cantar con alegría,
y de verlas en prisión
siento yo grave pasión
sin sentir nadie la mía.

(cited in Weissberger 2001, 42)

The solitude of Pinar rings plaintively from "sin sentir nadie la mía." Whether hers is a sexualized gaze or one expressing entrapment by those around her is elusive.⁶

On rare occasions, a woman may even be the object of her own gaze. Even though it is her lack of hearing which isolates Teresa de Cartagena, describing her suffering when she is among others, she becomes the object of her own gaze: "Quando en compañía de otríe *me veo*, yo soy desanparada del todo, ca nin goço de consorçio o fablas de aquéllos, nin de mi mesma me puedo aprouechar" (1967, 39). Teresa observes herself in company from the outside, standing apart, and seeing herself as "other," she is lonely but unable to draw on her own resources:

Cuando miro esta mi pasión en los temporales negoçios, véola muy penosa y de grandísima angustia, mas quando aparto el pensamiento de la cosas ya dichas, recojéndole a mi proprio seno, y veo la soledat que me haze sentir, apartándome de las negoçiaçiones mundanas, llámola soledat amable.

(1967, 40)

The senses purified

Hildegard relates the five senses to the five wounds of Christ, in the Edifice of Salvation in *Scivias* Book III: "The human body and soul by virtue of their strength contain the five senses and purify them through the wounds of Christ and lead them to righteousness of governance

from within” (1998, 88). Villena writes of the five wounds as five fountains, from which water and mercy flow to heal sinners:

Veni e no dubteu, tots los que de peccats vos trobau carregats, e poareu, ab gran goig, de les aygües dulçissimes de miséricordia decorrents de aquelles cinch fonts de les sagrades nafres que lo clement Senyor nostre ha pres en la persona sua, stant en lo camp de batalla, de la qual és exit ab victòria, reservant-se los dits senyals per a refugio e repos dels peccadors que a sa magestat acostar se volran.

(III, 158)

Villena refers to “peccats” washed clean, without matching Christ’s wounds to the senses. For Teresa, Christ’s wounds are a means of anointing. Anointing can take place either as a cure for sickness or as a commissioning for a given task. In Teresa’s case perhaps her writing:

Qué hago otra cosa syno seguir al Salvador no con pasos corporales mas con los afectos del ánima, corriendo en los olores de los enguentos suyos que son las sus preciosas llagas.

Yet again it is not with her physical body that Teresa seeks to follow to salvation but with the senses of her soul which not only enable her to see the right path to follow but imbue her with scented unguents, strengthening her to take it.

Conclusion

This chapter assumes that looking at women’s writing as a category of literary production which reveals a woman’s world view is worthwhile.⁷ To group women is the mirror image of what is done constantly in critical approaches to literature, since the canon is an overwhelmingly masculine production in which men’s writing is compared constantly. Women’s writing is often thought to be plagiarized, copied, or written by someone else.⁸ I finish with Jacques Derrida’s comments on alterity:

He says of feminine difference, [. . .] Does it not sketch on the inside of the work, a surfeit of un-said alterity? [. . .]The other as feminine [me] far from being derived or secondary, would become the other of the Saying of the wholly other.

(2007, 183)

Notes

- 1 This chapter was presented as a paper at the conference of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, 14–16 April, National University of Galway, Eire, 2014.
- 2 Yonsoo Kim (2012, 2) points out that there is no attempt to rescue women’s voices in the medieval period which takes account of the lands beyond the Pyrenees. Dronke (1984) considers Perpetua, Dhuoda, Hrotsvitha, Heloise, Hildegard of Bingen, and Marguerite Porete; Chance (2007) studies Hrotsvit, Marie de France, Marguerite Porete, Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich. There have, however, been occasional Spanish women included in writings about medieval women writers: Marcelle Thiébaux (1987) translates passages from Egeria (Spain), Amalasantha (Italy), Radegunda, Caesaria, and Baudonivia (Gaul), Eucheria (Provence), Dhuoda (Carolingian Gaul), Hrotsvitha, Anna Comnena (Byzantium), Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau, Matilda and Julian of Norwich (England), Marie de France and Christine de Pizan (France), as well as a selection of the writings of the French troubadours. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (1994) translates the *Memorias* of

- Leonor López de Córdoba (1362–c. 1412) (1986, 329–334). Similarly, in their *Women Writing Latin*, Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (2002) give their attention to the Spanish writer, Luisa Sigea (1522–1560), whilst Anke Gilleir, Alicia C. Montoya, and Suzan van Dijk (2010, 327–344) include an eighteenth-century Spanish writer, Inés Joyes. Mora (2005) compares Teresa de Cartagena with two Italian religious writers. The picture is not quite so stark as the one Kim (2008) paints, but even where Spanish women merit some attention, they are given far less than women from Italy, England, or France. There have been a number of comparative studies of Iberian women writers, including Calvo (1994), Castro Ponce (1994), Cortés Timoner (2004), Deyermond (1983, 1995), Frieden (2001), Mirrer (1995), Navas Ocaña and de la Torre Castro (2011), Redondo Goicoechea (1992), Rivera-Cordero (2011) and Vicente García (1989).
- 3 For a biography of Teresa de Cartagena, see Kim (2012), Marimón Llorca (1990, 104–113), Seidenspinner-Núñez (1998, 2004), Seidenspinner-Núñez and Kim (2004) and Surtz (1995, 21–40). For a biography of Isabel de Villena, see the introductions to Hauf's editions (1995, 5–20; 2006; Cantavella (2000, 2005, 2011); de Courcelles (2000, 103–107); Twomey (2013b, especially 1–20). For a study of Costanza de Castilla, see Surtz (1995, 41–67); see also Constance L. Wilkins' edition of *The Book of Devotions* (Constanza de Castilla 1998). For an overview of Iberian "holy women," including all three, see Surtz (2010). For Leonor López de Córdoba, see Estow (1982); Ghassemi (1989); Rivera-Cordero (2011, 180–188).
 - 4 Hildegard uses *visio* to "designate three related things: her peculiar faculty or capacity of vision; her experience of this faculty; and the content of her experience, all that she sees in her *visio*" (Dronke 1984, 146). The translations from *Scivias* are from Hart and Bishop (1990, 59).
 - 5 For a medieval representation of the five senses, see Mütterich (1955).
 - 6 Being included in the *Cancionero general* suggests that Pinar's poetry was accepted by the majority in court circles and that she was not differentiated from other court poets, as some have sought to argue.
 - 7 Paul Julian Smith also problematizes the validity of a category "women's writing" (1987, 220–222). Women are grouped to discover the nature of their education. Their authority and intellectual ability to write are also a reason for differentiating women: see Castro Ponce (1994), Quispe Agnoli (1997), Seidenspinner-Núñez (1997) and Vicente García (1989).
 - 8 A number of articles explore women's writing in relation to the canon (Navas Ocaña 2009; Ochoa de Eribe 1999; Piera 2003). Huélamo (1992, 154–58) discusses whether Constanza was a copyist, translator, or author. Additionally, Navas Ocaña and de la Torre Castro (2011: 94–102) explore how women's authorship was disputed in the case of three of the women's works, Teresa de Cartagena et al. (2011, 94–102).

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