

**The Aesthetics of Beauty in the Writings of Cloistered Women in Late Medieval and Golden Age Spain (Constanza de Castilla, Teresa de Cartagena, Isabel de Villena, and Teresa de Ávila)\***

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In this article, written to commemorate the anniversary of Teresa de Ávila's birth, I will examine how Teresa de Ávila, together with other cloistered women writers who preceded her, address the aesthetics of theological beauty. I will explore how each woman approaches the foundations of beauty in the natural order in creation and, then, I will examine the specifics of evangelical beauty, particularly Christ's beauty. I will focus on how the women consider beauty is deformed through sin and will end on how they address the beauty of Christ's atonement.

The topic of how patristic theologians explore beauty has been addressed in the case of a small number, mostly with reference to St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, and Hugh of St Victor (Harrison; Avenatti de Palumbo; Nichols; Forte; Poirel).<sup>1</sup> However, in the writings of cloistered women, still an area of Hispanic letters given relatively little critical attention, it has not been addressed at all (Deyermond; Surtz 1995, 2010; Twomey 2013).<sup>2</sup> Teresa de Ávila is, of course the most noted exception to the attention paid to cloistered women writers in the Golden Age and, in her case, there has been some treatment of her writing about beauty.<sup>3</sup>

I have chosen to explore the writings of four cloistered women. Teresa de Cartagena was probably a Clarian nun, although little is known about her profession. She belonged to the wealthy Mendoza family, among the most powerful in Castile. Teresa de Cartagena was born sometime between 1420 and 1435 and wrote two works, the *Arboleda de los enfermos* and the *Admiración operum Dey*. Constanza de Castilla was of royal descent, after her father, a prince of Castile, married the daughter of his jailor and fathered two children. Constanza probably entered the Dominican convent of Santo Domingo el Real in 1406, of which she became prioress. Constanza de Castilla wrote a liturgical *Libro de Devociones*, intended for her nuns. Isabel de Villena, born Elionor de Villena, entered the Clarian convent of the Santa Trinidad in Valencia in 1445, when she was 15 years old. In 1463, she became its abbess. Like Constanza, she was of royal descent, although illegitimate. Villena died in 1490 and, by her death, she had almost completed her magnum opus, the *Vita Christi* written in Latin and Catalan. Teresa de Ávila was born in 1515. She entered the Carmelite foundation, the Encarnación, at the age of 21, and wrote later of the lax way the Rule was kept. She went on in 1562 to found the reformed Discalced Carmelite convent of San José in Ávila and seven other

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\* This article forms part of the research group "La literatura hagiográfica catalana entre el manuscrito y la imprenta", referencia FFI2013-43927-P.

<sup>1</sup> Nichols and Forte write only of Augustine and Aquinas, placing them alongside other theologians from the modern era. Voll, however, is mistaken in his assertion that Teresa is "almost unique" in writing about beauty (318).

<sup>2</sup> Several cloistered women writers are among the women writers studied by Surtz (1995): Teresa de Cartagena (21-40); Constanza de Castilla (41-67); while Isabel de Villena was included in a later book (Surtz 2010, 516-18); see also Torres Castro. Spearing (2002), a useful annotated anthology of women religious writers, includes not a single Peninsular writer.

<sup>3</sup> In 1980, Américo Castro still considered that too little attention had been paid to the 'feminidad' of Teresa de Ávila (509-512). Carrera (2002 299-308) and Weber address the topic of writing and gender in relation to Teresa de Ávila. Others, for example Haliczzer, develop the topic of Teresa de Ávila in comparison with other women mystics, whether writers or not. Yet much of what has been written about Teresa de Ávila as a woman writer can be considered "patronizing" and sometimes "overtly sexist" (Pym 226). On beauty in Teresa of Ávila's writing, see Hatzfeld 257; O'Donoghue (1981a 84), Voll, and Anderson.

Discalced foundations (Chorpenning 247-48).<sup>4</sup> Teresa de Ávila wrote several books: her *Libro de la vida* was composed at the instigation of her confessor and in her *Libro de Fundaciones* she narrates how she founds the Order. In addition to these, she authored a number of poems as well as other mature expressions of her mystical experiences, *Las moradas del castillo interior* [*Moradas*] and her *Camino de perfección* [*Camino*]. Teresa de Ávila died in 1588. Of these women, even if all were the authors of spiritual works, Teresa de Ávila is the only one to be termed a mystic (King).

### Beauty in creation

For both Teresa de Ávila and Isabel de Villena, physical beauty has important connotations, for it is a feature of God's creation. Since the influence of St Augustine on the mystics cannot be underestimated (Peers 1960, III 147), I outline his principal views on beauty. St Augustine, relying on Plato, had established in Christianity the concept of looking beyond the created world to its source and Creator (Harrison 98). For St Augustine, creation contains traces or vestiges, which he terms "vestigia" of the Creator (Harrison 117).<sup>5</sup> He, therefore, considers created things are a "sign" which signal or give testimony to the Creator:

We have the evidence of the world itself in all its ordered change and movement and in all the beauty it presents to our sight, a world which bears a kind of testimony to the fact of its creation and proclaims that its maker could have been none other than God, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful. (Harrison 116)<sup>6</sup>

St Augustine's discussion of beauty can be divided into the following categories (Nichol 9): in relation to history (revealed through an ordered succession of changes), to man (through the beauty of the soul), and to Christ (through the economy of salvation he introduces), and, in this article, I follow that division. When he reflects upon nature and its beauty, "it must pass for the whole beauty of things in their temporal sequence to be displayed" (Harrison 119).<sup>7</sup> St Augustine established that nature pointed to the Creator rather than embodying the Creator, a view followed by later theologians (Harrison 100).

<sup>4</sup> See also Teresa de Ávila's *Libro de la vida* where she discusses the founding of San José de Ávila (2014 393 et seq.). In the *Libro de las fundaciones* (2012 40) the founding of a second convent, San José del Carmen, in Medina del Campo, is discussed. See also Peers (1954) for a classic study of the life and times of St Teresa which covers the background history of the founding of the new Order.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Ad Marcellinum de Civitate Dei contra Paganos* [*De Civitate Dei*] XI, 24 where Augustine discusses "De Trinitate divina quae per omnia opera significationis suae sparsit indicia" (col. 337); In his *De Libero Arbitrio Libri Tres*, II, 16.41 Augustine discusses how traces of God are found all around: "quoquo enim te verteris, vestigiis quibusdam, quae operibus suis impressit, loquitur tibi" (col. 1263).

<sup>6</sup> *De Civitate Dei* XI, 4: "mundus ipse ordinatissima sua mutabilitate et mobilitate et visibilium omnium pulcherrima specie quodammodo tacitus et factum se esse, et non nisi a Deo ineffabiliter atque invisibiliter magno et ineffabiliter atque invisibiliter pulchro se fieri proclamat" (col. 319).

<sup>7</sup> See, on number and beauty, *De Vera Religione Liber Unus*, 21.41: "Dum alia cedunt atque succedunt temporalium formarum numerum in unam pulchritudinem complent" (col. 146). Harrison notes (119 n108) that similar ideas arise in *De Natura Boni contra Manichaeos*, 8: "Fit autem decentibus et succedentibus rebus temporalis quaedam in suo genere pulchritudo ut nec ipsa quae moriuntur, quod erant esse desinunt, turpent aut turbent modum et speciem et ordinem universae creaturae" (col. 554); *Contra Epistolam Manichaei*, 41.48; *De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim*, I, 8.14: "quaedam vero secundum suo tempore modos, dum per decessionem secessionemque rerum saeculorum pulchritudo contextitur" (col. 251). In *Contra Secundinam Manichaeum*, 15 (col. 591) the same concept is expressed and illustrated with reference to the syllables in speech. In *Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum*, I, 9, the creation of form (beauty) is described: "ita intelligendi est ut Deus de materia informi fecisse mundum sed eam concreasse ab mundo" (col. 610).

Teresa de Ávila points to creation as a sign of God's presence, relying, as she does so, on what had by then become a well-established topos in Christian thought. Most theologians, if they address the subject, consider that the created world demonstrates God at work in the world (Harrison 97-139; Poirel 249). Quite simply "the beautiful leads to God" (Poirel 249). Teresa de Ávila attests that, in the early part of her life, the fields, streams, and flowers, which she could see around her, recalled God's presence, as she recounts in her *Libro de la vida*: "Aprovechábame a mí también ver campos, agua, flores: en estas cosas hallaba yo memoria del Criador" (9.5; 2014 195). When the young Teresa saw natural beauty and, implicitly, recognized its beauty, she indicates that the Creator began to draw her soul inexorably to himself. As she writes of how the Lord began to awaken her soul to his presence, she refers to St Augustine's *Confessions*, which she had read (9.7; 2014 196).

Teresa de Ávila refers to the way created things act as a trigger for 'memoria', which implies an existing relationship between God and his created beings, rather than as simply being a testimony or a sign. St Bernard, writing three centuries earlier, banished all images from his monasteries so that his monks could construct "spiritual temples" in their minds which "relied on a repertoire of images already in place" (Carruthers 85) and Teresa of Ávila's approach to memory places a similar reliance on the mind's own bank of remembered details. The concept of sign in St Augustine's thinking, on the other hand, points to a way to the beginning of a new relationship. Teresa de Ávila implies something once known and then forgotten and she provides a temporal approach to relationship between created being and Creator. Mircea Eliade refers to this awakening as the soul's "re-cognition of its celestial origin" (129) in his discussion of remembering and forgetting, a principal trope of world mythologies. For Teresa de Ávila, memory is also located in particular landscapes of the past which, as in the monastic art of memory, raises the contemplative heavenward.<sup>8</sup> Here, Teresa de Ávila demonstrates God's action through time and place in the case of an individual soul, her own.

### **Beauty of the human soul and creation**

Teresa de Ávila opens her *Moradas* by demonstrating how creation can and should be rehabilitated after its fall from grace. She does this by showing how each of God's creatures has the opportunity to become a unique dwelling for God: "se me ofrece lo que voy a decir con algún fundamento; que es considerar nuestra alma como un castillo todo de un diamante o muy claro cristal" (*Moradas primeras*, 1; 2015 211-12).<sup>9</sup> For Teresa, each created being has the potential to recognize Christ who dwells within, though many fail to do so because of sinfulness. Mirroring the beauty of the Virgin's soul, the beauty of the individual human soul, particularly when it is untouched by sin, is expressed by Teresa de Ávila through her focus on its crystalline or diamond walls. The beauty of the soul is not dissimilar to the norms of luminous beauty, for it too reflects the light through a myriad of pure surfaces which allow the light to pass through and illuminate the interior.<sup>10</sup>

As well as the beauty of the human soul, in which Christ has come to dwell, Teresa de Ávila often takes examples of objects from creation to illustrate aspects of the nature of God

<sup>8</sup> Carruthers discusses the "monastic art of memory" and the way in which the "where" gives a starting point to structure the "backgrounds or places, the 'habits' (habitations) of one's own thinking mind" (82).

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the synergies between Teresa de Ávila's castle with its crystalline walls and those of the "torre de cristal" on the *Ínsula Firme* in *Amadís de Gaula*, see Márquez Villanueva (II 499). However, the city of Jerusalem is also made of beautiful jewels and gold, likened to crystal: "the wall is built of diamond, and the city of pure gold, like clear glass" (Revelation 21:18) (Newman 56).

<sup>10</sup> On the "ubiquity of light" in medieval literary images, including dawn, gold, blond hair, glint of arms, the *locus amoenus*, and feminine beauty, see Zumthor 17-18 (citing Frappier).

or of a human being's relationship with the Creator. In the *Camino*, she speaks of the beauty and 'limpieza' of the soul:

Pues hagamos cuenta que dentro de nosotras está un palacio de grandísima riqueza, todo su edificio de oro y de piedras preciosas, en fin, como para tal Señor; y que sois vos parte para que este edificio sea tal, como a la verdad es así, que no hay edificio de tanta hermosura como una alma limpia y llena de virtudes, y mientras mayores, más resplandecen las piedras; y que en este palacio está este gran Rey, que ha tenido por bien ser vuestro Padre; y que está en un trono de grandísimo precio, que es vuestro corazón. (28, 9; 2008 175)

The beautiful palace, God's place of habitation on earth, is closely allied to the Old Testament description of Zion with many of the same features from the natural world adorning it. Zion, like the soul Teresa describes is beautiful because God reveals his glory there (Newman 55).

Another example of the soul's relationship with God is the image of tending a kitchen garden where the gardener puts in effort to prepare the ground but in which God then takes charge to plant flowers:

Ha de hacer cuenta el que comienza [que comienza] a hacer un huerto en tierra muy infructuosa que lleva muy malas hierbas, para que se deleite el Señor. Pues hagamos cuento que ya está hecho esto cuando se determina a hacer oración un alma y lo ha comenzado a usar. (11.6; 2014 209)

Particularly important is the purpose of cultivating the plot to create something beautiful to delight God: 'para que se deleite el Señor'. Teresa then goes on to add how God tends the flowers:

Y con ayuda de Dios hemos de procurar, como buenos hortolanos, que crezcan aquellas flores y tener cuidado de regarlas para que no se pierdan, sino que comienzan a echar flores. (11.6; 2014 209)

Whilst the Old Testament has many instances of God as master-gardener, where God tends the vineyard or when the desert blooms as a sign of the Lord's favour (Isaiah 27:2-4; Isaiah 35:1-5), Teresa de Ávila's kitchen garden is a homely creation image. In her version of the garden, humanity and God collaborate to ensure that flowers bloom. The human being, desirous of collaborating with God to help their garden grow, must water the flowers, through prayer, to ensure the right results. Unlike some Old Testament instances, in which human effort in watering planted spaces comes to nothing without God, Teresa de Ávila shows how human effort collaborates with and complements that of God, as it does in Isaiah (5:1-2). In this she accords fallen humanity immense dignity, as she records and values its efforts to come closer to God.<sup>11</sup>

In her *Moradas* Teresa chooses a piece of gold set with a precious stone to explain how the presence of Christ can be appreciated: "que es como si en una pieza de oro tuviésemos una piedra preciosa de grandísimo valor y virtudes" (*Moradas sextas*, 9; 2015 403). The created world, in this case two valuable objects, gold and a precious stone, assist Teresa de Ávila in

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<sup>11</sup> The garden as a symbol of the soul in Teresa of Ávila's writing is discussed, for example, by López Baralt 76.

explaining the value she places on union with Christ.<sup>12</sup> The precious stone recalls the pearl of great price to be sought out and possessed (Matthew 13:26) (Anderson 337).<sup>13</sup>

For Isabel de Villena too, beauty and creation are closely linked. She writes of beauty on over sixty occasions and it is to the Virgin that the concept of beauty in the *Vita Christi* most often refers (Alemany et al.).<sup>14</sup> Villena shows beauty closely allied to the sinless nature of the one who possesses it and, in this way, she relates the beauty of the Virgin Mary to God's original creation of human beings in whom their beauty reflects their inner holiness, which was then despoiled by the Fall. One example of how she discusses the beauty of the Virgin occurs just before the marriage of Joseph and the Virgin. Joseph is advised by the angel who comes to tell him not to put aside the Virgin and the angel praises her as being better than all other women because of her beauty in both body and spirit as well as in her holiness: "Ni haveu vista semblant a ella en bellea corporal ni spiritual, ni la sanctedat sua sabeu que tinga equal?" (Villena I, 261). Bowled over by these angelic arguments, Joseph takes the Virgin as his wife.

Villena directly references creation in relation to the Virgin's beauty for, in her case, beauty is also greater than that of the most magnificent of created things:

*Pulchritudo ejus vincit solem et lunam et composito decoris ad ornamenta virtutum.*  
Volent dir: "O, que la bellea de la nostra Senyora venç lo sol e la luna, e lo seu bell comport, ab lo ornament de tantes virtuts!" (Villena I, 217)

Because the Virgin's beauty must be perfectly luminous, Villena sets it beyond the beauty of the two great heavenly lights, the sun and the moon, the first objects of God's creative activity in Genesis (1:3). The beauty of the Virgin is more than skin deep, for it also signals her beautiful –and, by implication, holy– behaviour: 'comport'. These words which praise the Virgin's beauty in terms of creation are set in the mouth of St Michael and occur at the Incarnation, as the Virgin arrays herself with the jewels gifted her by God the Father, preparing to receive the processions of the ranks of heaven. Idealized female beauty (Heller) also plays its part (Twomey 2013, 125-31). The jewels, thus, mark how the Virgin collaborated with God as she assented to the new creation and the coming of the New Adam, Christ. They are God's gift to enhance her beauty.

Inner and outer beauty is central to Villena's understanding of the essence of the Virgin Mary and she had already addressed the theme very early in the *Vita Christi*. As St Anne dresses the Virgin to take her to the Temple, the Virgin's beauty and holiness feature:

E la reverent matrona Anna féu vestir a la Senyora les millors robes que tenia; ab tot fossen pobrelletes, eren honestíssimes e molt netes; e estés-li los cabells sobre les spatles, que li donaven tanta bellea e ornament, *Quia nunquam fuit tam bene coopertus Salamon in omni gloria sua;* car nunqua fon tan ben abillat Salamó en tota la glòria sua, com aquesta Senyora ab la sua natural bellea e composició virtuosa. (Villena I, 60-61)

In this description of the three-year-old Virgin, Villena again partners physical beauty with virtuous behaviour, "composició virtuosa" (I, 61). She compares the Virgin to another of the

<sup>12</sup> In a discussion of the fifth 'morada', Myess discusses the "many gifts in the soul" (299), which, for her, represent untapped potential, talent, and vision. Myess interprets Teresa's *Moradas* for present-day mystics.

<sup>13</sup> Constat, cited in Anderson 337, discusses the pearl as an incarnational symbol in patristic literature.

<sup>14</sup>The *Concordança* (Alemany et al.) reveals that the *Vita Christi* has twenty instances of 'bellea' applied to the beauty of the Virgin, whilst other instances refer to the beautiful jewels, pearls, and other objects which adorn her to enhance her beauty. Arronis Llopis (88-89) refers to the beauty of the Virgin in the *Libro de las historias de Nuestra Señora* by Juan López de Salamanca (Biblioteca Nacional MS 103, Madrid). Two articles on the beauty of the Virgin are about to be published in *Medievalia*: Arronis Llopis forthcoming and Baños forthcoming.

beauties of God's creation, the lilies of the field, which are better dressed than Solomon in all his glory (Matthew 6:29). Villena here provides one of the few details of what constitutes the Virgin's beauty, and she draws attention to her hair spread over her shoulders, "los cabells sobre les spatles", showing that loosened hair is to be considered beautiful in women. She also reveals her awareness of how the Virgin is represented with her hair loose on her shoulders in many late fifteenth-century altarpieces, particularly those which depict the Joys of the Virgin. These often show the tiny Virgin, with her golden hair tumbling down her back, climbing the steps of the Temple.

The beauty of the Virgin is also taken as read for Teresa de Ávila. Whilst Teresa is considering founding the convent of San José in Ávila, she is encouraged by a vision of the Virgin and St Joseph. Whilst Teresa is aware of the presence of Joseph, it is the Virgin she sees more clearly: "al glorioso San Josef no vi tan claro" (23.15; 2014 412). She mentions the Virgin's great beauty, in particular her face and her white, shining robe:

Era grandísima la hermosura que vi en nuestra Señora, aunque por figuras no determiné ninguna particular, sino toda junta la hechura de su rostro, vestida de blanco con grandísimo resplandor, no que deslumbra, sino suave. (23.15; 412)

Teresa, like Villena, does not give any particular details which characterize the beauty of the Virgin, except perhaps for the shape of her face, "hechura de su rostro". However, the features of the Virgin's beauty are enhanced by its luminosity, as they are for Villena. Teresa de Ávila describes the Virgin's robe as being shining. The shining nature of the Virgin's robe is not harshly bright. Rather, it has a soft focus, being "suave". Teresa also seems to see the Virgin and St Joseph lifted in to heaven accompanied by hosts of angels: "los vía subir al cielo con multitud de ángeles" (412). The white robe in which the Virgin is clothed in Teresa's vision is very different from the rich brocades in which Villena imagines the Virgin in her *Vita Christi*:

stà gloriosa aquesta reyna per vostra magestat elegida en mare del unigènit fill vostre, ab la vestidura daurada de aquell tan singular or de profunda humilitat, embellida e circuïda de totes les virtuts! (Villena I, 162)

In both women's description of the Virgin's beautiful clothing, rich shining cloth is intended to enhance the luminosity of her beauty. Villena draws on Old Testament sources for her depiction of the Virgin's luminous dress. She takes the clothing of the Virgin from that of the princess who enters the chamber of the king in Psalm 45, a text often thought to prefigure the Virgin (Twomey 2013): "the princess is at the palace —how beautiful she is! Her gown is made of gold thread" (Ps. 45:13). Teresa de Ávila may consider that the white clothing of the Virgin is appropriate because it is similar to the shining attire which the angels wear at the Resurrection (John 20:11), or to the clothing of Christ at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). Despite the possibility of influence from biblical texts, both women were also influenced by the way the Virgin's clothing was depicted in their time. In Villena's day, rich brocades frequently clothed the Virgin, whilst by Teresa de Ávila's, a white robe often took precedence, particularly in depictions of the "Tota pulchra" and, later of the Assumption.<sup>15</sup> Assumption, or Dormition, altarpieces may have played their part in suggesting the vision and the Virgin surrounded by angels to Teresa de Ávila. Teresa seeks to establish the Virgin as part of the Gospel of Resurrection, whilst Villena seeks to set her in the context of spiritual union with her son.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Vicent Macip's "Tota pulchra" altarpiece for the cathedral of Segorbe, completed between 1531 and 1535 (Stratton 46 and at plate 2). The Tota pulchra is an early representation of the Immaculate Virgin, dressed in white, and surrounded by Old Testament symbols.

The Virgin's physical beauty is again emphasized by Villena at the very beginning of the *Vita Christi* and, there, her focus on creation is very pronounced. On this occasion, the Virgin is described in architectural terms. When the angel announces her birth to her father, Joachim, he affirms that she will be a palace which is being constructed to house Christ, at the future moment of his descent to earth to save humankind:

obra de tan excel·lent e singular obra, que semblant jamés no fos trobada, en tant que los miradors hajen a dir, admirats de la bellea de aquesta casa: *Non est hic aliud nisi domus Dei et porta celi*; volent dir: certament aquesta posada no és feta ni fabricada sinó per a la magestat de nostre Senyor Déu, e nengun altre no deu aturar en ella. (Villena I, 9-10)

Villena cites Psalm 127:1, a verse often found in Conception liturgies, which is here used to emphasize how God prepared the Virgin to be a beautiful dwelling place for his son (Twomey 2013, 38-39). Villena does not at this point set out how the palace-Virgin is beautiful. She contents herself with providing the reaction of those who see it. For example, it is so beautiful that it amazes those who look on it: "admirats".

The Virgin's beauty is chosen by God, for she is akin to the beautiful Shulamite of the Song of Songs, often interpreted as the Church or the soul, beloved of God. The Virgin is "speciosa", beautiful to look upon, which Villena translates as most sweet and singularly beautiful: "dulcíssima e singularment bella". She is, therefore, desired by each person of the Trinity in turn:

*O Virgo dulcis speciosa a Deo Patre sponsa electa: a Deo Verbo mater pre-electa: a Spiritu Sancto protecta.* O, Senyora dulcíssima e singularment bella! Grans e incomprendibles són les dignitats vostres; car Déu lo pare vos ha elegit per sposa, lo Fill vos ha triada per mare, lo Sperit Sanct vol ésser protector e guardador de la vostra puríssima virginitat. (Villena I, 152)

Villena opens her *Vita Christi* by establishing how God is prevailed upon to establish the Virgin as a unique and sacred building. The figure of the dwelling in Villena's *Vita Christi* relies on God's action as master builder, a metaphor for God's original and new work of creation. God as a builder is emphasized by both "obra" and "fabricada". Because of both its beauty and its unique purpose, the dwelling God builds is also one of a kind. It is both "singularment bella" and also "semblant jamés no fos trobada".

The creative work of God in building the beautiful dwelling is similar to the work of creation and thus enables Villena to demonstrate her belief that the Virgin was a uniquely created being, similar to the man, Adam, and the woman, Eve, created by God as the pinnacle of the creation stories in Genesis. The trope of God as master builder has a long history in both Christian and Jewish tradition (Carruthers 16-21).

As a sacred dwelling, the Virgin is a container for God and this image of the house and dwelling, in which God abides, is one which Teresa de Ávila adopts in her *Moradas*, when she writes, as discussed earlier, of the soul as a "posada", "castillo", or "palacio", where God dwells (*Moradas primeras*, 1; *Moradas segundas*, 2; 2015 212, 230). She may consider God's dwelling a transient one.<sup>16</sup> Human existence begins and ends in a short space of time. However, the "morada" is also more permanent than Burrows allows, for whilst "posada" and "morada" suggest a place for a traveller to rest, both "palacio" and "castillo" have a solid permanence. In

<sup>16</sup> Burrows provides an interesting interpretation of "moradas" as "staging-inns" from her reading of "mōnē", the word usually rendered as mansions (John 14:2).

any respect the “morada” has powerful incarnational connotations for God “pitched his tent among us” (John 1:2) when the Word became flesh (Newman 55). The human soul as a container for the Word is certainly part of Teresa’s concept of the “morada”.

### **Physical Beauty as a root cause of sin**

Nevertheless, for some women writers, physical beauty does not link to creation, but rather to sin and its causes. St Augustine, before them, argued that, whilst physical beauty was created by God, it is equally possessed by the good and by the evil (Harrison 152). The dichotomy between recognizing beauty in creation and seeing beauty as an element of sinful humanity has a long tradition. In Jewish thinking wariness about female beauty, which is part of a turning away from God, is apparent in many of the prophets. For example, in Ezekiel (16:15), Yahweh chastises Jerusalem for acting like a whore and trusting in her beauty rather than in God (Kettler 14). Babylon the “pearl of kingdoms” is nevertheless overthrown by God’s hand (Isaiah 13:19) and Israel’s beauty is similarly treated (Lamentations 2:1): “he has flung the beauty of Israel from heaven to the ground”. Female beauty has been decried by the Fathers of the Church and by a good number of misogynist writers (Archer).

Teresa de Cartagena designates comeliness and beauty as one of the root causes of the sin of pride, placing it alongside eloquence, dignity and worldly honours, illustrious lineage, and abundance and wealth (Seidenspinner-Núñez 58-59). In effect, Teresa de Cartagena considers that proportion and symmetry of the body may be a source of pride. She may here have in mind male physical form and particularly masculine physicality. She describes the advent of suffering using the metaphor of a harness. The harness first saps strength, making the sufferer too weak to boast. Suffering also deforms the comely proportions of the body, meaning that it is no longer well-proportioned but, rather, twisted.

In Teresa de Cartagena’s third root of the sin of pride, she adds that youth and beauty may lead to pride and, here, she seems to have in mind female beauty. Suffering and disease quickly rob a person of both, since they “so quickly convert(s) beauty into ugliness” (Seidenspinner-Núñez 59). When Teresa de Cartagena considers what constitutes ugliness, she quantifies it as white turned to black and then, interestingly black turned to dark green: “suffering which can turn white to black and black to dark green” (Seidenspinner-Núñez 59). She allies, therefore, the progressive deterioration of beauty to lack of luminescence, blackness, but also to decay, greenness, the colour of slime and putrescence.

Teresa de Cartagena explores only the way in which physical beauty deteriorates as well as its effect on the individual who possesses it. She does not however explore how physical beauty might lead others into the sin of concupiscence.

Whilst Teresa de Ávila does not refer directly to concupiscence, she relates how care for her outward appearance began to lead her soul away from God:

Comencé a traer galas y a desear contentar en parecer bien, con mucho cuidado de manos y cabello y olores, y todas las vanidades que en esto podía traer, que eran hartas por ser muy curiosa. (2.2; 2014 140)

“Curiosa” has the sense of clean or spruced up (140n3). It can mean “aseada”, “pulcra”. Teresa de Ávila mentions three traditional aspects of women’s beauty regimes: the care of hands, of hair, and perfuming. To these, she then adds a regime of cleansing. She condemns them all.

### **The beauty of Christ**



The beauty of Christ is a feature of the perfect harmony of human and divine in his person. Villena, for example, refers to Christ's extraordinary beauty, as she describes the Virgin's response to the baby in her arms which echo the words of Psalm 45:2 ("Of all men you are the most handsome"):

E mirant e contemplant aquell petit cors, e vehent la excel·lent bellea sua, conegué ésser aquel del qual David havia dit: '*Spetiosus forma pre filiis hominum*'; car era lo pus bell de tots los fills dels hòmens. (Villena I, 270)

She then proceeds to refer to that harmony of the divine and the human: "aquella divinal persona tan tendre e delicada". Villena takes the Messianic prophecy in verses 2-9 of the Psalm and directly applies it in the Virgin's words to her son; however, it is only the first of the Messiah's attributes and perhaps the most appropriate for a tiny newborn –his beauty–, rather than his gracefulness, his majesty, his truth, gentleness, or uprightness, that is mentioned.

Villena's Virgin pours out her love for Christ by praising his beauty. He is her son and Lord, but also her spouse:

*Pulcher es, dilecte mi et dechorus: quia tu es pulcher et bonus per essentiam, ego autem per participationem [...].* Volent dir: "O, fill meu ý mon Déu ý mon senyor! Vós, amat meu, sou bell e ornat de incomprehensible pulchritut, car sou bell per essència!" (Villena III, 353)

The Virgin addresses Christ using the cry of love uttered by the Bride in the Song of Songs: "ecce tu pulcher es, dilecte mi, et quam decorus", translated into English as: "How beautiful you are my beloved, how beautiful you are!" (Song of Songs 4:1). She calls out her love of Christ just before she enters for her Coronation.

Teresa de Ávila is not the first to address the beauty of the Lord, which springs naturally from commentary on the Song of Songs, the biblical text which has often been interpreted as a metaphor for the union of the soul with Christ. In the Song of Songs, the bride (or soul) pours out her love for the Bridegroom, Christ, lovesick because of his beauty (Carrera 2009). The medieval mystic, St Bernard of Clairvaux comments on the Lord's beauty using the words of the Song of Songs, "How beautiful you are my love, how beautiful" (236) and the principal characteristics of the mystic Spouse, inspired by the Song of Songs, is his beauty. Rogelio García Mateo discusses Teresa de Ávila's christology but does not do so with reference to the beauty of the Spouse.

Constanza de Castilla combines verses from the Song of Songs which praise the Lord's beauty into her first reading in her Incarnation office (6:1 and 5:10-15). The Lord is fair and ruddy, chosen among thousands. Constanza uses these verses to describe the head, hair, eyes, cheeks, lips, legs, belly and general appearance of Christ:

*Dilectus meus candidus et rubicundus, electus ex millibus. Capud eius aurum optimum, come eius quasi elate palmarum. Occuli eius sicut columbas per rivulos aquarum que lacte sunt lote et resident iuxta fluentia plenissima. Gene illius sicut areole aromatum consite a pimentariis. Labia illius lilia distilancia et mirram primam. Manus eius tornatiles auree, plene iacintua. Venter eius eburneus distinctus saphiris. Crura illius columpne marmoree, que fundata sunt super basses argenteas. Species eius ut Libani, electus ut cedri. Gutur eius suavissimum et totus desiderabilis.* (Constanza de Castilla 49)

Constanza, like Villena, chooses praise of Christ's beauty as the Old Testament reading for the Incarnation. Through it, she is able to create a story of love, relationship, and physical beauty which provide a narrative for Christ coming into the world. Of course, Constanza does not diverge from the norms of beauty established by the author of the Song of Songs. It might be relevant that she misses out the reference to the beloved being black as a raven (Song of Songs 5:11).

Teresa de Ávila is less inclined to mention features of masculine beauty from the Old Testament prefigurations of Christ. Whilst Teresa most often writes of the beauty and splendour of the vision of Christ, she occasionally mentions some aspects of his physical body. His eyes are beautiful but also gentle and kindly: "estos ojos tan hermosos y mansos y beninos del Señor" (Moradas sextas, 9; 2015 405). These aspects of Christ's beauty are to what N. D. O'Donoghue refers when he speaks of Christ as the "apotheosis of human form divine in masculine mode" (1981a 84).

Villena's treatment of Christ's beauty, which she considers enhanced by the Resurrection is also striking. For Villena, Christ's Resurrection is celebrated by all:

Los àngels, molt alegres de la festa que feya lo Senyor a les creatures sues, e lo goig sens mesura que elles tenien en contemplar la persona sua ornada de tanta bellea e glòria, començaren a cantar [...]. (III 162-63)

In her depiction of the "festa", Villena reveals how Christ's resurrected body is adorned with beauty and glory, "ornada de tanta bellea e glòria", as though by a string of pearls. This new level of beauty, allied with glory, is added to the beauty Christ already had as the perfect exemplar of humanity.

In her *Moradas*, when Teresa de Ávila seeks to explain how she sees Christ in all his beauty, she likens it to a beautiful, locked tabernacle. She writes of the tabernacle, a eucharistic container, for which the soul does not have the key but which it longs to open: "mas no la osamos mirar ni abrir el relicario, ni podemos, porque la manera de abrirle sólo la sabe cuya es la joya" (Moradas sextas, 9; 2015 403). Her words recall St Augustine's view of the tabernacle as the way to the house of God in his commentary on Psalm 41.<sup>17</sup>

Of Christ's face, she gives few details, except to mention the quality of his beauty: "su resplandor es como una luz infusa y de un sol cubierto de una cosa tan delgada como un diamante, si se pudiera labrar" (Moradas sextas, 9; 2015: 404). Teresa de Ávila combines different qualities of light: "resplandor", "luz infusa", "sol". "Resplandor" is a light which comes from within causing an object to glow. "Luz infusa" suggests a soft light which is emitted by an object but which has another source. "Sol" is one of the names of Christ: "sol de justicia". Teresa writes of the sun with special workmanship, a sun with diamond covering causes the light to be cast in a myriad of ways, as it is transmitted through the surface of the diamond. She also highlights how the appearance of Christ is so bright that it dazzles the eyes of a human being who cannot bear to let his or her gaze rest on it: "mas habéis de entender que, aunque se detenga algún espacio, no se puede estar mirando más que estar mirando al sol" (Moradas sextas, 9; 2015 404).

When Teresa de Ávila relates in the seventh "morada" how Christ appears to her, she brings together two of the same concepts, light and beauty, and she adds to them a third, majesty. It is significant that she has a vision of Christ in all his beauty, just as she has

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<sup>17</sup> "These things I remembered and poured out my soul within me, for I shall go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God". Carruthers (251) comments on St Augustine's trope of the tabernacle in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 41.8.4-6: "sed hic quaerendus est, quia in tabernaculo inuenitur uia per quam uenitur ad domum".

consumed the host. “The eucharistic *species* of bread and wine [...] provide a sacramental veil for Christ’s real presence” (Astell 31) and so it proves for Teresa de Ávila who, on eating the host, immediately goes into an ecstatic trance: “a ésta de que hablamos se le presentó el Señor, acabando de comulgar, con forma de gran resplandor y hermosura y majestad, como como después de resucitado” (Moradas séptimas, 2; 2015 435). The *species*, or outer form, of the host is already related to beauty, “speciosus” and, thus, the real presence of Christ is also beautiful. Teresa de Ávila relates Christ’s corporal beauty to Resurrection and to salvation.

### Sin and the deformation of Christ’s beauty

Constanza de Castilla, in her pre-communion prayer in forty-four parts, at the appearance of Christ when carrying his cross on the Via Crucis (chapter 25), considers that his beauty has become unrecognizable, even to his mother, beneath the tortures and beatings meted out by Pilate and the Jews: “La Señora pudo dezir: ‘Señores, dexadme llegar por que conosca si es él, que de mi fijo fue escripto: Speciosus forma pre filiis hominum’” (17). Yet because of the sinful acts of the Jews, the Virgin fails to recognize Christ, as he approaches her, burdened by his cross:

E la triste madre desde que vido tu cuerpo todo llagado, tu rostro escupido escurecido, tu cabeça de espinas coronada, una señal negra en tu maxilla, tus ojos apremidos, como non te podia conoçer pudo preguntar a los judíos: “¿Qué omne es éste que levades a matar con tanta priesa e oprobio?” (16-17)

Here Constanza meditates on the prophecy about the beauty of the Messiah. Both her choice of the words of the Psalm and her words about how Christ’s body has been made the opposite of its usual beauty through the operation of human sin are important.

In line with medieval thought, the words Constanza cites contain two concepts related to Christ’s beauty: his form (*forma*) and his essence (*species*, *speciosus*). These are the same definitions of beauty which inspired the thinking of St Augustine. In Constanza’s understanding of Christ’s acceptance of the sins of the world, humanity’s sin deforms him to such an extent that he becomes unrecognizable. Meanwhile, Constanza uses two adjectives, which she considers the opposite of radiant beauty: “escurecido” and “negra”. “Escurecido” suggests that something which was once bright has become dark and the concept has a temporal element, a before and after sin. Also Christ’s body is “llagado”, covered in wounds, whilst his head is crowned with thorns. Both the wounds and the deep incisions made by the thorns create openings in the skin, which are another feature of how the body of Christ is made ugly for Constanza de Castilla. Elsewhere in her devotions, Constanza calls on Christ to take away from her heart all carnal filth: “tires de mi corazón toda orrura carnal” (6). Like Teresa de Ávila after her, sin and filth are allied in her theology. In order to purify it, Constanza pleads for her soul to be washed of the stain which sin has put on it: “yo te suplico que te plega lavar mi ánima de las muchas manzillas que tiene” (6). Constanza’s description of the nature of sin fits with her prayers to accompany Christ’s baptism. The baptismal waters are sanctified by Christ when he enters the waters of the Jordan at the time of his own baptism (Matthew 3:13) and those waters cleanse the erring soul from both filth and stains: “orrura” and “manzillas”.

Ugliness and sin are also closely allied for Teresa de Ávila. In her *Moradas*, she dedicates the first ‘morada’ to the beauty of the soul. In the second chapter, she writes of the sinful soul, which she considers ugly: “se trata de cuán fea es el alma que está en pecado mortal” (Moradas primeras, 2; 2015 221). Teresa de Ávila writes of sin as darkness and murkiness but also adds how the sun is still at the centre of the sinning soul but, when the soul

turns to sin, it cannot be seen: “No hay tinieblas más tenebrosas ni cosa tan oscura y negra, que no lo esté mucho más” (Moradas primeras, 2; 2015 221-22).

The soul which remains close to Christ is like a spring from which flows clear and sparkling water, however, the soul which strays from Christ because of sin, is no longer planted in a sparkling spring but rather in black and foul waters. St Teresa de Ávila not only writes of blackness, therefore, but to it adds filthiness and foul stench: “Ansí el alma que por su culpa se aparta desta fuente y se planta en otra de muy negrísima agua y de muy mal olor, todo lo que corre de él es la mesma desventura y suciedad” (Moradas primeras, 2; 2015 223).

In her reversal of the tree planted by the waterside (Psalm 1: 1), which symbolizes the man blessed by God, Teresa de Ávila reveals how those who separate themselves from God put down their own roots into foul waters. She emphasizes the allusion to the psalm through her use of ‘desventura’ [misfortune or lack of blessedness]. The correlation between sin and putrefaction was long a feature of medieval theology and might be traced back to Christ’s own words in Matthew’s Gospel. He calls the Pharisees and those who appear to be keeping God’s law “hypocritical”. They are like tombs which are beautiful on the outside and full of the bones of the dead and “every kind of corruption” (Matthew 23:27).

In medieval times it was thought that saintly relics should be clear and jewel-like (Bynum 187), whilst sinful bodies were rotten, putrescent, and crawling with worms. Constanza de Castilla writes of her own sinful pride recalling before her sisters her own body as dust, ashes, and a worm: “Quia ego sum pulvis, cinis, vermis, et non homo, opprobrium hominum et abieccio plebbis” (4). She blends words from Psalm 22:6: ‘But I am a worm, not a man, scorn of mankind, contempt of the people’, from Genesis 3:19: ‘For dust you are, and to dust you shall return’, from Genesis 18:27: “It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord who am but dust and ashes”, and from Job 30: 19: “I am no more than dust and ashes”.

In her *Libro de la vida*, Teresa returns to sin, which she represents by filth or dust, as she prays to God to keep her dwelling place, in which God is to take up residence, clean: “¿No tuviérades por bien —no por mi ganancia, sino por vuestro acatamiento— que no me ensuciara tanto la posada adonde tan continuo habíades de morar?” (I, 8; 2014 138). In the *Libro de la vida*, Teresa de Ávila writes of herself as a “posada”. She provides an early outline of the concept of the soul as an interior castle, where God is to dwell, which she develops in her later work, *Moradas*.<sup>18</sup> She considers her actions, albeit thoughtless or unconscious, might cause the house to become dirty, “me ensuciara” (2014 138), when she writes of how she tires of devotion. The sinful soul is likened to an unswept room and may be intended to recall Luke’s narration of the parable of the lost drachma (15:8). The woman sweeps the house and finds the missing coin, which symbolizes a lost soul returning to God: “There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner”. The link between sin, sweeping up dirt, and repentance or turning back to God are evident in the parable. The concept of sin as filth and God’s redemption of sin as cleansing or washing can be traced back to the Old Testament, in texts like Isaiah (4:4): “when the Lord washed away the filth of Zion’s daughters”. Sinfulness, which is like spiritual filth is washed away by the waters of baptism (1 Peter 3:21). St Paul, in 2 Corinthians (7:1) calls on Christians to “wash ourselves clean of everything that pollutes either body or spirit”.

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<sup>18</sup> Numerous scholars have written about the mystical metaphor of the interior castle. See, for example, Ricart; Chorprenning 1979 and 1985; O’Donoghue 1981b; López Baralt 80-81; Voll; Márquez Villanueva; Williams 108-142; Hughes; Bradburn-Ruster; Duchesne; Tyler 131-157. It has been thought to derive from chivalry novels, and their castle settings, from Islamic mysticism, and to relate to explorations of space. The concentric castle may be a place of “defense” (Hughes 377). The castle-soul can also be the domestic space, courtly, “grand and spacious” (Anderson 379). It also seems to represent the age-old concept of perfection because of its circular shape (López Baralt). Interpretations approach the castle from numerous perspectives, including theological (Burrows; Tyler) or a literary one.

Because Teresa de Ávila had written of the soul as a luminous crystal palace, she adds, in her second chapter, how sin acts in the same way as a dark cloth which covers glass: “mas si sobre un cristal que está a el sol se pusiese un paño muy negro, claro está que, aunque el sol dé en él, no hará su claridad operación en él” (Moradas primeras, 2; 2015 223). The light continues to shine on it but, as Teresa de Ávila says there is no longer any effect or “operación”. The light cannot pass through to illuminate the interior nor can it reflect the light. Teresa de Ávila may wish to echo St Paul’s words in his letter to the Corinthians. Sin prevents the soul from reflecting “the glory of the Lord”. It is as though it veils the face and prevents the transformation of the Christian into the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Light passing through glass, to which Teresa de Ávila alludes in her first “morada”, is a figure which changed its meaning through the Middle Ages. Light and glass became closely associated with sinfulness, becoming first the metaphor used for representing the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Light which could pass through glass without damaging it was one of the features observable in nature which could exemplify God’s possible actions in the world. The image, drawn from the natural order, reveals how light, the first element of God’s creative activity in Genesis (I, 3), can pass through a substance, glass, without damaging it and, for this reason, becomes a gage of sinlessness both in the conception and birth of Christ, which leave the Virgin virginal, even though she has given birth, and in the conception of the Virgin. Both doctrines sought evidence from natural phenomena to show how God could already work great mysteries in nature and so could do the same in the case of the Virgin. Teresa de Ávila already suggests in her light metaphor that there is intervention by God on the soul, through her choice of “operación” (2015 223). In the same way as light, God could pass through the Virgin’s birth canal without causing her body any change and she could remain a virgin. In Isabel de Villena’s *Vita Christi*, for example, the birth of Christ is swift and painless, expressed in the verb “came forth”: “ixqué lo Senyor del ventre virginal de mare sua sens dar-li nenguna dolor, leixant-la verge e pura” (I, 269). Her words recall those of Psalm 19:5: “who comes forth from his pavilion like a bridegroom”. Light passing through glass later became the metaphor used to represent the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary because it showed what God was capable of doing in nature and therefore what he might do, should he so wish, for the Virgin, making something seemingly impossible become possible (Twomey 2008, 131-33). Teresa de Ávila here draws on this association of the sun’s rays on glass, closely allied with sinlessness, to emphasize the nature of sin, which blocks out the light, preventing the soul from coming to knowledge of God.

Teresa’s ‘self-abasement’, and her description of her sinful self as a “muladar tan sucio y de mal olor” which the Lord turned into a garden in the *Libro de la vida* (10.9; 2014 205), has led scholars either to disbelieve that she could set herself so low or to see it as the result of a bout of depression:

Can she really have thought herself “a sea of evil”, “filthy scum”, and “most wretched of all who have been born?”... We prefer to think that [these words] were penned in moments of depression or at seasons when her ardent love of God and her clear vision of his holiness made her write, passionately rather than reflectively, lines which she could never bring herself to erase. (Peers 1927-1960, I 149-50; also cited in Weber 48-49)

Teresa de Ávila’s choice of the word “muladar”, dungheap, to describe her soul, the place where household ordure was thrown, has, however, close connections to the description of sinful people as “dung” for example in Jeremiah (16:4). Similarly, those whom the Lord has cast down “lie like dung on the earth” (Jeremiah 25:33). Further in Psalm 83, God’s enemies served to manure the ground (83:11). Teresa de Ávila probably has in mind God’s enemies, when she refers to herself as a dungheap. Writing about dirt, filth, or ephemeral dust is not

infrequent. Constanza de Castilla cites the Psalms, calling herself dust and ashes, and her words about her sinful self are, thus, not dissimilar to Teresa de Ávila's. Like Teresa de Ávila's, they take a scriptural source for words of self-abnegation.

Whilst, as discussed earlier in the chapter, Isabel de Villena described the Virgin's soul, unsullied, as perfectly luminous, Mary Magdalene describes her own soul as deformed by leprosy. Sin and deformity are thus closely allied. As she pleads for humanity, she refers to the marvellous works Christ has effected in her own case, for he has healed her leprous soul: "e les grans maravelles que cada dia feu en guarir les còssors heu a fer guarint la lebrozia de la peccadora ànima mia" (Villena I, 101). Leprosy was the disease which had enormous consequences in the medieval period. It led to exile from home and family, and brought about rejection. It was also a disease thought to be caused by sin.

### Christ's atonement and beauty

Christ, however, atoned for sin of the world once and for all. According to St Bernard, the beauty of the Lord overrides the ugliness of sin and its effects on him becoming, even at the moment when physical earthly beauty is stripped away, perfect: "How beautiful you are to me, my Lord, even in the very discarding of your beauty!" (II 239; cited also in Kettler 19). Even the torture and death of Christ had its own beauty, therefore, beyond anything thought beautiful by the world. For St Bernard, the Bridegroom's beauty is expressed through his love for the Bride-soul, even though he existed long before her (II 239). Beauty can also be expressed through the unity of the created with the uncreated, through a harmony which brings together, God, man, and creation. Teresa of Ávila expresses this, having described the early stages of union with the Bridegroom, Christ. She, then, explains how caring for others "es la verdadera unión con su voluntad" (Moradas quintas, 3; 2015 322).

The actions of Christ in atoning for the sins of the world, therefore, may be expressed as a new understanding of beauty: a beauty which is no longer physical but which goes beyond human understanding (Kettler 20). Beauty lies in Christ's atonement which may be interpreted as a double movement, involving both "substitution" and "solidarity" (Kettler 21). It lies in making whole what was damaged and in constructing a "new creation", in which Christ, humanity, God and the cosmos are transformed and restored to perfect harmony (Kettler 22).

The beauty of Christ at the moment of atonement can be glimpsed in the words of Constanza de Castilla, when she writes of the cross which she sees adorned with pearls: "Salve, cruz preciosa que in corpora Christi dedicata es et ex membris eius tamquam margaritis ornata" (29). At the moment of horror, when the body of Christ is nailed to the cross, there is also a moment of beauty. Even the cross is "margaritis ornata". For Teresa de Ávila, too, the cross's beauty lies in its redemptive potency. In one of her verses, the cross becomes an anointing oil, "preciosa" in its beauty:

Es una oliva preciosa  
la santa cruz,  
que con su aceite nos unta  
y nos da luz. (Vega 250)

It anoints and at the same time enlightens. It heals and brings to knowledge. It drives away the darkness of sin.

The perfect love and sacrifice of Christ, which is perfect restoration of harmony and beauty to the fallen world, is expressed by Teresa de Ávila in chapter 4 of her *Moradas* in the words: "mira lo que costó a nuestro Esposo el amor que nos tuvo, que, por librarnos de la muerte, la murió tan penosa como muerte de cruz" (2015 325). The perfect mandorla of

harmonious co-existence can be found in the words of Teresa de Ávila's poem "Búscate en mí": "alma, búscate has en Mí/ y a Mí búscate has en tí" (Vega 244). Mirroring divine consubstantiality (John 10:30), Teresa's words evoke a never-ending circle of love, a transforming, regenerating self-giving offering, which never turns in on itself but reaches out forever to the other. In this the soul, in its redeemed relationship with Christ, is a mirror of Trinitarian *perichoresis* or mutual in-dwelling.

### Conclusion

Beauty opens Teresa de Ávila's work of maturity, her *Moradas*. She begins by describing the beauty of the created human soul which God inhabits. Beauty surfaces also in Teresa's earliest experiences of God's call and spans the whole of her encounter with God. It is the beauty of Christ which causes her soul to be enraptured at the moment of mystical union.

In the women who precede Teresa de Ávila, beauty may also be a signal of the harmonious creation, revealing the pure soul of the most perfect creature, the Virgin Mary, preserved from sin. For other women writers, most particularly Teresa de Cartagena, beauty is at the root of sin. Teresa de Ávila too shows how too much cultivation of personal beauty leads away from God.

I have begun to explore in this essay how one aspect of beauty, beauty of creation, and of re-creation, is expressed in the writings of Teresa de Ávila, comparing it with how other women writers addressed the same theme. Constanza de Castilla, Isabel de Villena, and Teresa de Cartagena all wrote in the century preceding Teresa de Ávila. Although it is unlikely they read each others' works, all address the aesthetics of beauty. There are a number of similarities about how they do so. Their writings on beauty, and indeed their writings, deserve further exploration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I am preparing an essay on the heavenly realm and its beauty.

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