THE EARLY MODERN FOUNDATIONS OF THE QUERELLA DE LAS MUJERES

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The Querelle des femmes, often called the Querella de las mujeres in Hispanic studies, is difficult to define. Consisting of a vast multilingual and intertextual network of texts produced from the Middle Ages onwards, by both male and female authors, the querelle refers both to women as the subject of debate and to women as disputants in works that seek to define their moral, physical, and intellectual qualities, generally in contrast to those of men. Many querelle texts also seek to prescribe and proscribe relationships between the sexes, and to question the institutional and customary subjugation of women to men. Engaging in the querelle, therefore, is both a political and a rhetorical practice, at once a reflection of perceived gender norms and of desires to (re)shape them. Constance Jordan, writing of the extensive reach of the querelle, remarks that not only was it concerned with the place of women within patriarchal society, but also with the very “nature of authority” (308).

The roots of the querelle stretch far back into the past, while its central arguments and conceits have maintained their currency well into modernity. Indeed, the ubiquity and persistence of “the question of woman” obscures any notion of a single origin and consequently, “anyone wondering where to begin to understand [it] [. . .] must recognize that it is possible to begin almost anywhere” (Bloch, Medieval Misogyny: 13). This chapter will consider representative foundational texts of the querella, which emerged in Spanish letters as a distinct and highly influential literary mode in the middle of the fifteenth century, when a series of texts defaming and championing women appeared within the cultural ambience of the court of Juan II of Castile and his queen consort, María of Aragon. At the same time, cancionero poets active in various courts in Castile, Aragon, and Navarre also composed and exchanged verses on the nature of women. A generation later, in the milieu of the court of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel I of Castile and Fernando of Aragon, writers familiar with the first waves of the literary polemic, wove the debate into prose fictions.

As María Jesús Lacarra notes, the querella embraces three separate but complementary orientations: women writers, women readers, and women as a literary theme. Nevertheless, it is in this period as well that Teresa de Cartagena added her voice to the querella, providing an early demonstration of how the debate on the nature of women formed part of
many women writers’ authorial self-fashioning from the fifteenth century onwards. Greater numbers of women writers entered into the querella in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as was the case for the European querelle more generally. Further, and despite the almost exclusively male authorship of the querella, historical women played important roles in their creation, as dedicatess, patronesses, and intended readers, including Maria of Aragon, Isabel I, and other aristocratic women in their courts. Women’s matrocinio, or “matronage,” to use Ana Vargas Martínez’s coinage, constituted “a form of intervening in the querella, of creating public opinions, of engaging in politics” (265). The foundational querella texts, like those of the pan-European querelle, such as Christine de Pizan’s La cité des dames, Boccaccio’s Corbaccio, and Agrippa’s De nobilitate et praeclarentia foeminei sexus, had a lasting influence.

The arguments presented throughout the querella are remarkably consistent. Christine de Pizan, writing as a resistant reader of Le Fèvre’s Lamentations of Matheolus in the early fifteenth century, remarked that it seemed as if, “philosophers, and poets and [. . .] orators all speak from one and the same mouth,” when speaking of women’s faults (3). Works championing women also tend to follow set patterns. Indeed, the repetitiveness of the querelle texts has led some readers to consider them parts of a literary game of little moment. However, much recent scholarship on the querelle, and the Iberian querella more specifically, has focused on the need for the historicized study of works that have frequently been evaluated from anachronistic perspectives or read as inconsequential rhetorical exercises and light entertainment. As Julie Campbell notes, scholarship on the querelle has evolved from considerations of its relation to twentieth-century feminism to its “function as a barometer of social and cultural tensions” (361). The commonplaces of the debate served varied ideological agendas specific to the time and place of their enunciation. If the content of the querelle depended upon “a splendid little store of off-the-peg items, ready for embellishment and rearrangement in new contexts,” (Blamires, The Case for Women: 11), those contexts, literary, historical, geographical, political, and social, gave the debate its significance.

Antecedents and authorities of the querella

The antecedents of the querella can be found in the medieval literature of misogyny. A series of quips attributed to Diogenes and Socrates in the thirteenth-century Bocados de oro exemplify the central rhetorical strategy of the misogynist tradition: “There is no greater evil than Woman [. . .] [Socrates] saw a sick woman, unable to leave her bed, and he said, ‘evil stays with evil’ [. . .] He saw a young woman learning to write and he said, ‘do not heap evil upon evil’ ” (43, 63–64). This repeated equation of la muger with el mal, like other pronouncements “in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term” and “the use of the substantive woman or women with a capital W,” have the effect of reducing Woman and women to an undifferentiated category (Bloch, Medieval Misogyny: 5). In such medieval definitions of woman, as Susan Mosher Stuard similarly observes, the authors “speak and think of a category rather than of women as they knew them” (144). In Bocados, Socrates’ students ask if their mothers and sisters are exempt from the universalizing equation of women with evil. The answer they receive is a resounding, yet unsatisfactory “no.” This tension between the category “Woman,” and women in lived experience pervades the querella.

Late medieval and early modern writers on the inferiority, instability, sexual depravity, garrulousness, and shrewdness of women, and the consequent danger they posed to men, had many authorities at their disposal. Misogynist texts turned repeatedly to biblical wisdom literature, the second account of the generation of man and woman in Genesis, and to the sayings of the Fathers of the Church. They also turned with frequency to Aristotelian and Galenic
physiology, which taught that females were “defective” or “deformed” males, and associated women with the body and materiality. This view was echoed in the humoral theory that judged men to be generally hot and dry, and women cold and moist, a difference which accounted for menstruation. Sources of imitation and citation were also to be found in popular proverbs, classical satire, and school texts, such as Juvenal’s *Satires* and Ovid’s *Ars Amoris* and *Remedia Amoris*. Medieval writers who developed the canon, such as Boccaccio, Walter Map, and Jehan Le Fèvre, had also become renowned experts on the subject by the fifteenth century. Many misogynistic works were aimed at inspiring clerical celibacy, while others offered advice regarding sexual hygiene, remedies for lovesickness, and palliatives for amorous rejection. Listing examples of the “power of women” over the men who become sexually involved with them is yet another abiding rhetorical strategy used in antifeminine works. Solomon, the primordial authority on women, also serves as a negative exemplar, one in a long line of wise and powerful men so blinded by lust that they fall victim to the wiles of non-submissive women, become idolaters, and cede their dominance to women.

The authorities available to writers wishing to write in praise of women, though fewer than the cornucopia on offer to antifeminine writers, were also plentiful. In fact, in many cases, profeminine arguments drew upon the same texts as the misogynist proofs. Genesis, used as the indisputable evidence of Eve’s inferiority to men in misogynist writing, was countered by a series of arguments for her superiority to Adam due to her creation in a nobler place and from nobler materials than the first human. Eve’s alleged guilt for the Fall was contested by profeminine writers who argued for Adam’s greater responsibility and gullibility. The writings of the Church Fathers in praise of virginity and of the historical women they knew also provided models. Even Aristotle could be turned to the service of exalting rather than denigrating women. Above all, the case for women in medieval and early modern literature relied upon stories of exemplary women whose actions belied the litanies of misogynist’s reasons for their *horror feminae*. Catalogues of biblical heroines, heroic women of classical antiquity, and female saints abound in the profeminine tradition. Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris* (*Famous Women*) served many later writers as a reference, making him an authority for a range of positions in the debate.

Medieval and early modern profeminine texts rarely offer new definitions of femininity, nor do they question women’s frailty and physical inferiority to men. Rather, they present an alternate interpretation of shared definitions and alternate conclusions to theological exegeses. Both profeminine and misogynist writings present men and women, masculinity and femininity, as contraries, reflecting the Aristotelian and Scholastic polarities of categories of thought. Following humoral theory, many writings on women equate physiological sex with character. However, some authors suggest that gender performance may not always be a reflection of biology. For example, it is repeatedly averred that many women, though naturally prone to vice, have managed to overcome the inherent barriers of femininity in order either to act like men or to demonstrate those virtues most valued in women, such as chastity, piety, and obedience. The possibility of overcoming one’s sex, celebrated by profeminine authors, implies some awareness on their part that the supposedly universal and transhistorical definitions of *woman* do not always adequately describe individual women. As Archer argues, Hispanic texts that address issues of sexuality and gender identity reveal “a real concern with the viability of the authoritative view of women” which is “essentially contradictory,” resulting in a “strong sense of indeterminacy” (*The Problem of Woman* 204).

A recurrent trope in medieval and early modern writings about women neatly encapsulates the “woman question” itself: *Mulierem fortem quis inveniet?* (Who shall find a valiant woman?) (*Vulgate Bible*, Proverbs 31:10; trans. *Douay-Rheims*). In the Bible, King Solomon’s rhetorical question introduces a peon to the model wife who is industrious, wise, and a credit to her
husband, in contrast to the querulous and dangerously seductive women whom Proverbs urges
men to avoid: “Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price
of her. / The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no need of spoils. / She
will render him good, and not evil, all the days of her life.” In many late medieval and early
modern works that address the nature of women, the question not only sparks discussions of
ideal feminine behavior, but also serves as an authoritative proof that good women are non-
existent. While many profeminine texts echo Solomon’s praise for the good wife, the
Lamentations of Matheolus (c.1371–1372) typifies the misogynist interpretation: “Solomon, in his
works, makes an amazing comment, which supports my case, for he exclaims, ‘Who could find
a virtuous woman?’ The implication here is, of course, that this would be impossible” (Le Fèvre:
194).11

Historical contexts

The querella emerged in Spanish letters in a period marked by many struggles for dominance
between powerful factions in the nobility, and by related cultural shifts concerning nobility,
courtliness, and religious orthodoxy. The importance of gender politics and gender in politics
was highlighted by the reigns of three Trastámaran sovereigns, Juan II (1405–1454), Enrique
IV (1425–1474), and Isabel I (1451–1504). Juan II’s long reign began under the antagonistic
co-regency of his uncle Fernando of Antequera (d. 1416) and his mother Catherine of Lancaster
(1373–1418). After reaching his majority, Juan’s rule was troubled, in large part due to the
enormous power he gave to his favorite, Álvaro de Luna (1388–1453), who was rumored to
hold complete control over the king, through witchcraft and sexual enthrallment. Royal courts
had long been the locales for oral and written expressions of misogyny, but their vehemence
and the responses they provoked intensified in the ambience of the court of Juan II and María
of Aragon, where the polemic between the defenders and defamers of women formed part of
the rivalries between the Castilian and Aragonese nobility.12

When Enrique IV succeeded to the throne, he earned the moniker of “The Impotent,”
despite the birth of a recognized heir, Juana of Castile (c. 1462–1530), whom Enrique’s enemies
alleged was in truth the daughter of the royal favorite, Beltrán de la Cueva (c. 1443–1492).
Enrique’s rivals among the nobility deposed him in effigy in 1465, reputedly shouting “¡A tierra
puto!” (Down with the faggot/male prostitute!) as they did so. The anecdote shows how closely
sexual activity and royal power were associated in the political imagination of the time. After
Enrique’s death, Isabel eventually ascended the throne after a civil war pitting her supporters
against those of her niece, Juana of Castile. Isabel retained her rights and status as sovereign
queen following her marriage to Fernando of Aragon, and both Juan II and Enrique IV were
portrayed as weak, effeminate, heterodox, and sexually deviant by chroniclers wishing to celebrate
Isabel I as the savior of her kingdom who at last achieved the goal of defeating territories under
Muslim rule.

Margarete Zimmerman observes that the “fundamental historicity” of the querella “is
particularly visible in phases where the speed picks up and the arguments become more intense
[.. .] [and] new foci of the discussion are developed” (35). Throughout the period, the texts
of the querella were in continual intertextual dialogue with works addressing other subjects that
were heatedly debated at the time, such as the status of conversos, Marian theology, and the
debate between arms and letters.13 Further, as Barbara Weissberger has observed, during Isabel’s
reign, issues of “queenship, gender, power, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion” intersected in the
querella. Isabel herself embodied “a threat to the patriarchal status quo,” even though her political
and cultural agendas were design to reconfirm it (“Deceitful Sects”: 225).
The first wave of the *querella*: 1430s–1460s

Numerous poems and treatises on the “woman question,” authored by men who held important positions in the courts of Castile and the Crown of Aragon, appeared in quick succession from the 1430s on. Two works served as textual instigators of the debate in the middle of the fifteenth century: Alfonso Martínez de Toledo’s treatise, the *Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho* (1438), so titled in homage to Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio* (c. 1355); and Pere Torrellas’s *Maldezir de mugeres* (*Slander against Women*) (ca. 1445). Both widely-read works came to represent misogyny as a whole. They are gynophobic and anxiety-ridden, painting women as frightening creatures that deprive men of power. Ironically, by envisioning the vulnerability of men to women, these texts put the supposedly natural and unquestionable order of male superiority into question.

Martínez de Toledo (1398–1470), who served as chaplain to Juan II and later to his son, Enrique IV, offers the *Arcipreste* as a guide for young men that will teach them how to avoid and protect themselves from sin in the form of “loco amor” (crazed love), which he describes as a kind of sexual enthrallment by “las viçiosas mugeres” (depraved women). Throughout, the *Arcipreste* warns against the spiritual and physical dangers of earthly love and particularly against the apotheosis of female objects of desire in the courtly “religion of love.” Divided into four parts, the *Arcipreste* first invites readers to fear “loco amor” in thirty-eight chapters delineating how love for women causes destruction and sacrilege. Loving women poses a danger to men because it inverts the natural order of the sexes, bringing misfortune on any man who makes himself subject to women’s capricious authority (60). Martínez de Toledo does not deny the rare existence of good women and alludes to Proverbs by likening them to precious rubies (97).

Women are a source of continual horrified wonder, mockery, and rhetorical invention in the second part of the *Arcipreste*, which encourages readers to laugh at the maddening women depicted in its exemplary tales and parodic dialogues mimicking hysterical female voices. Indeed, Martínez de Toledo gives the lie to his own affirmation that the “faults, vices, and blemishes” of wicked women “are numberless and cannot be described,” since much of the book is devoted to providing a detailed inventory of such vices and the ways that they lead men to sin (14).

While the preface states that the *Arcipreste* will describe the evils of *viciosas mugeres* (wicked women), the following chapters frequently speak of *la muger* (Woman) as a single category and attribute negative characteristics to *toda muger* (every woman), for example, “To doubt that the wicked woman is envious would be to sin against the Holy Ghost, for every woman, when she sees another more comely than she, is like to die of envy” (116). Parts three and four, which are much briefer than the first two, are dedicated to an explanation of the humors and their effects on sexual conduct, followed by warnings against attributing sin to the power of those same astral signs and humors and the necessity of accepting the will of God.

The *Arcipreste* was successful in the context of its first historical audiences and later gained its own canonical status among generations of readers. First printed in 1498, five more editions followed between 1499 and 1547. There is some evidence that the *Arcipreste* was received by its late medieval audiences as something less than a serious and didactic work. The printed editions, some of which only reproduce the second part of the treatise, and whose titles advertise that the book is about “the vices of wicked women,” also contain an epilogue in which the author-figure dreams of “over one thousand famous ladies, well-known and renowned,” who attack the writer and demand that he burn the book. The book is saved when the author begs their forgiveness (305–306). The epilogue ends with an interjection that echoes yet undercuts the book’s earlier warnings, “Woe to the man who sleeps alone with his pains and in whose house the distaff never enters the whole year through!” (306). Martínez de Toledo was long dead.
when the first printed edition of his *Arcipreste de Talavera* appeared, and scholars disagree about his possible authorship of the epilogue, yet its presence serves as an ironic commentary on the text, suggesting that the book itself is in many ways subject to women, just like the woebegone men brought under their sway that Martínez de Toledo describes in the early chapters of the *Arcipreste*.

Pere Torrellas (c. 1420–c. 1492) was a Catalan courtier in the service of Juan II of Navarre and Aragon (1398–1479). The exact date, circumstances, and intentions of his composition of the *Maldezir* are unknown; however, by the 1450s it had become infamous in the courts of Castile and the Crown of Aragon. The *Maldezir* begins with the admonition, “the man in love who courts / a woman, destroys himself,” and goes on to detail women’s indiscriminate lust, hypocrisy, love of flattery, capriciousness, cunning, greed, and mendacity (53–54). Although Torrellas cites no authorities on the nature of women, he alludes to the Aristotelian notion that women are “defective men,” born due to gestational damage or privation: “Woman is that animal / we call an imperfect man, / procreated by defect / of nature’s good heat” (60–61).

The majority of Torrellas’s poetic proofs of women’s iniquity in the *Maldezir* concern men’s vulnerability. One stanza, however, alleges that women behave badly because they fully understand their actual political and social subordination: “Feeling that they are subjugated / and lacking any power / in order to take control / women form shady sects” (58–59). These verses “tacitly acknowledge the inequities inherent in the traditional gender hierarchy” (Weissberger, “Deceitful Sects”: 213). While Torrellas is not objecting to patriarchy, the poem here does seem to recognize that the subjugation of women not only leads to women’s dissatisfaction, but also may negatively affect men. The *Maldezir* concludes with an about-face; the final stanza praises an unknown beloved lady whose singular virtues are an exception to the rule (60–63).

Despite the *Maldezir*’s palinode, Torrellas’s contemporaries interpreted the poem as an unmitigated attack on women requiring either a chivalrous response in their defense or a vigorous affirmation of misogyny. Suero de Ribera (c. 1410–1475), the poet known only as Carvajal (fl. 1450s–1460s), and Anton de Montoro (c. 1404–c. 1477), all wrote verses berating Torrellas and other *maldizientes* for their lack of nobility and courtliness. Montoro also wrote verses in agreement with the *Maldezir*. The humanist and statesman Gómez Manrique (c. 1412–1490) composed a rebuttal to the *Maldezir*, refuting each of its assertions and praising women in stanzas imitating Torrellas’ rhyme and meter. The *Maldezir* and its responses circulated in fifteenth-century *cancionero* manuscripts and also in the *Cancionero General*, printed throughout the sixteenth century. The *cancionero* context suggests that debating the nature of women in the courts of Castile and Aragon was one way that male courtiers might assert their cultural and symbolic capital. Suero de Ribera’s response to Torrellas neatly captures the spirit of this display when he affirms that “noble men must / defend women” (282).

Juan Rodríguez del Padrón’s *Triunfo de las donas* (c. 1440) and Diego de Valera’s *Defensa de las virtuosas mugeres* (before 1445) were both dedicated to María of Aragon (1403–1445), the first wife of Juan II and an active patron of the court’s cultural activities, and were possibly written at her behest. The *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres*, attributed to Álvaro de Luna, the favorite of Juan II, was composed with the same courtly environment in 1446. Pere Torrellas also wrote a *Defensa de las donas* at some point following the composition of his (in)famous poem, yet his *Defensa* did not enjoy the wide and long-lived diffusion of his incendiary *Maldezir*.

These treatises all champion women’s merit by first explaining the logical weakness of the misogynists’ universalizing disparagement, often repeating the antifeminine arguments in order to turn them into profeminine propositions, and then by providing copious exempla of good...
women. This last rhetorical strategy functioned as a response to Solomon’s famous question, *mulierem fortém quí inveniet?* by showing readers just how many women of worth populate scripture, history, and even the present day. Like the versified challenges to Torrellas’s *Maldezir*, the treatises are also acts of self-promotion; each author-figure presents himself as an ideal courtier and a learned man, proffering a service to ladies and to the court.

Rodríguez del Padrón (fl. 1440s), a well-traveled court and ecclesiastical official, takes direct aim at the misogynists in the *Triunfo de las donas* in order to argue for the moral, intellectual, and political capabilities of women. Following his dedication to “the most learned” Queen María, Rodríguez del Padrón opens the *Triunfo* with a courtly scene in which young men discuss questions of honor, virtue, and nobility, and ask the author to write a treatise containing his opinions on the subject (211–213). Such a treatise should be dedicated only to the most noble and virtuous of readers, so courtiers decide to ask “la questão odiosa” (that hateful question), namely, are men superior to women or women to men? (213). The author then describes his meditation on the conundrum, which begins with a rehearsal of all the misogynist topos. He is overheard by a nymph, Cardiana, who scolds him for blindly following the teaching of the “slanderous and vituperous Corbacho” (Maldiçiente et vituperoso Corbacho) who relies upon fictions rather than trusted authorities for his accusations (216). Cardiana lists fifty-four proofs of the merit of women, citing scriptural and philosophical antecedents, including Aristotle, as well as numerous examples of legendary good women and evil men. She begins with commonplaces regarding Eve’s creation in a better place of superior material to Adam, her standing as one of the “delights of paradise,” and Adam’s greater guilt, since “knowledge was prohibited to man, but not to woman” and Adam sinned knowingly while Eve was tricked (217–221). Cardiana, like other defenders of women, champions the virtues of charity, piety, and obedience. The *Triunfo*, however moves beyond profeminine commonplaces when Cardiana explains that women are more chaste and virtuous than men, because not only are the female “shameful organs” hidden, unlike men’s, but also because during a rape the female victim looks up to the skies, while her attacker looks at the ground (222). This last supposed proof no doubt seemed as dubious in the fifteenth century as it does today, and was perhaps intended as a touch of lubricious and dark humor.

The *Triunfo* enters into the realm of satire when Cardiana defends women’s use of cosmetics, so frequently decried by misogynist writings. When women paint their faces, she argues, it enhances their natural and God-given beauty, in contrast to all of the beautifying chicanery of men who pad their calves and corset their waists in order to appear more attractive (222). Cardiana offers the story of the biblical judge and heroine Deborah as proof that “women should rule and fight when it is fitting, just like men, who have empowered themselves alone to rule through tyranny” (234). Cardiana’s thirty-third affirmation suffices as a general summation of the *Triunfo*: “it is clear that there have been a greater number of evil men than women and a greater number of good women than men” (241). Cardiana concludes by praising Queen María’s lineage, an indication of Rodríguez del Padrón’s political sympathies. The dreamer awakes and takes the tale of Cardiana and her defense of women back to the court. The *Triunfo* was quite popular in the Castilian court, and in 1460 was translated into French for Philip the Good of Burgundy.

Diego de Valera (1412–1488), a widely traveled courtier and a prolific author, was the son of Juan II of Castile’s royal physician. He declares in the proem to the *Defensa de las virtuosas mugeres* that he writes as if to a male friend who wishes to understand the rational for the “horrible material” propagated by a “new sect” of men “who take reckless delight in defaming women (230). Such men, Valera explains via an excursus on mythological founts of wisdom, are ignorant and crude. Further, these blasphemers’ hearts are fickle and will “move like leaves on the wind,” Valera says, echoing one of the commonplaces of misogynist invectives (231). The *Defensa*
proper is a brief text, but it is accompanied by Valera’s extensive gloss, allowing for the display of his own humanistic erudition: the defenders of women have traveled to the zenith of Parnassus, drunk from the Pirene fountain, and they have heard Apollo’s lyre and the sweet songs of the muses.

Valera’s repudiation of misogyny is delivered in the form of a catalogue of good women from the Bible and history, who all, though their cultivation of the cardinal virtues disprove the misogynists’ claim that women are naturally weak and inclined to vice. He begins with famous virgins and chaste wives, including the story of Lucretia, a staple in catalogues of good women. A Roman matron who stabs herself in the heart after she has been raped, Lucretia exemplifies the value of feminine honor. Despite her innocence and lack of any adulterous desires, Lucretia does not allow even a suspicion of unchastity to tarnish her and her husband’s reputation. The stories of virgin martyrs, which also proliferate in the catalogue, place a similarly high price on the protection of chastity, conveying the idea that “the only good virgin is a dead virgin,” since a woman’s virginity and chastity are lost once the male gaze or lustful thought lights upon her (Bloch, “Chaucer’s Maiden’s Head”: 120).

The ranks of good women in the Defensa are swelled by thousands of nameless virginal Israelites, nations of chaste and constant women (Germans, Indians, Menians), and the eleven thousand virgin martyrs in St. Ursula’s entourage. Valera’s overall persuasive strategy is to refute the misogynist claim that all women are wicked with copia, abundance as unassailable proof, shored up even further by the amplificatory gloss providing the legends of each good woman or group of women.31 Individual examples in the catalogue epitomize how profeminine works often explain the behavior of heroic women by stating that performed with “manly heart” (con viril corazón) and left aside their “womanish habits” (dexados los feméneos apostamientos) (272).32

In order to prove, contrary to misogynist belief, that contemporary women can also overcome their muliebrity, Valera offers readers three examples from the recent past: María Coronel, famous for staving off the sexual advances of Pedro The Cruel (1334–1369), either by disfiguring her face with boiling oil, according to some sources, or for combating her sexual appetites during her husband’s absence by mutilating her genitals with a burning brand, according to others; the unnamed “Mother of Alvar Pérez de Osorio,” a modern-day Lucretia, who chose death over a ruined reputation; and Doña María García, a beata who died a virgin at the age of eighty (243). Of the ill-informed misogynist authors, Valera says women should “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” yet he takes both Ovid and Boccaccio to task, criticizing the De arte amandi and the Corbaccio as rants written by old men who should have known better (247–248).

The conclusion to Valera’s legendary catalogue exemplifies how both misogynist and profeminine texts agreed about women’s natural physical and mental inferiority by asking, “Lord, what blindness is this that occupies mortal vision? Could there be anything more virtuous than those women, to whom Nature gave weak bodies, tender hearts, and generally sluggish intelligence, yet who are even more virtuous than men, to whom valiant bodies, quick intelligence, and strong hearts are a natural gift?” (240).33

Álvaro de Luna, the powerful favorite of Juan II of Castile and political enemy of Valera, outdoes the Defensa’s copia in the Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres (Book of Virtuous and Illustrious Women), an extensive, tripartite catalogue of over one hundred exemplary women from the Bible, Antiquity, and the Christian calendar of saints. The catalogue is introduced by a preface by Juan de Mena, Luna’s political supporter, who praises him as a man worthy of lasting admiration and memory, a subject for others to write about due to his bravery in combat, political skill, and intelligence. Mena claims to be thanking Luna on behalf of all the illustrious and virtuous women of the day for having rendered them the honor of writing a defense of women’s honor.
In his poems, Luna declares that he will use reason, logic, and authority to refute the commonly held negative views of women, and takes aim at the claim that women’s natural inferiority to men necessarily makes them more prone to vice, citing Aristotle’s *Ethics* as proof that women can become accustomed to behaving sinfully or virtuously, just as men do (141, 144–145). Citing Solomon’s praise of the *mulier fortis*, Luna argues that all of the other negative remarks about women by the wise king found in the Bible apply not to all women but only to the *desordenadas* (unruly women) (154).

The women in Luna’s catalogue belong to the same well-known repertoire that his predecessors drew upon, although he includes no contemporary examples. Lucretia’s familiar story provides the first chapter of the second section, on pagan women. The catalogue ends on a note of authorial uncertainty. Faced with the decision of which famed woman should conclude the third and final section, Luna says he first thought of Saint Elizabeth, and then of Saints Pelagia and Cassia—two harlot saints, whose stories revolve around repentance for sexual sins—before electing Saint Catherine of Alexandria, famed for sanctity, beauty, and wisdom as his ultimate example, perhaps intending his conclusion to be a posthumous homage to Catherine of Lancaster (536). The legend revolves around the saint’s debate with fifty philosophers, leading to their conversion to Christianity, and Luna argues that St. Catherine excels even Aristotle and Plato in wisdom (543). The valedictory argument of the book returns to Genesis and the creation of Woman in the image of and as companion to Man (549). Queen María died in 1445, and it is possible that Luna’s reference to marriage at the close of the *Libro* was intended to inspire Juan II to remarry. 34

These attacks and defenses of women all rely upon a certain gender orthodoxy, based upon the supposedly natural physiological and moral inferiority of women. The biblical account of creation and fall, supported by Aristotelianism and humoral theory, explained the existence of women, as secondary human beings made for, after, and from men, and, further, as marked forever by original sin in physical ways that men are not. The dividing lines of the debate, then, are drawn within a structural and conceptual order in which women are *a priori* as something other and lesser than men. The heroines praised in the profeminine catalogues are cultural ideograms, often corresponding to what Blamires sums up as a fantasy of “meek, compassionate, virtuous women” who are “voluntary domestic and sexual cushion[s]” for men (Blamires, *The Case for Women*: 5–6). The stories of Lucretia and her avatars teach that the female chastity that supports male honor is not only vulnerable and must be guarded from the mere suspicion of its corruption, but also that it is more valuable than a woman’s life. As Pamela Benson remarks, in this way, defenses “tame” images of unruly and independent women in order to counter “the threatening notion that women are equal to men,” implicit in rebuttals to misogynist invective (*Renaissance Feminism*: 47). Conduct literature written for women, such as Martín de Córdoba’s *Jardín de nobles donzellas* (1468–1469) and the anonymous fifteenth-century *Castigos que un savio dava a sus hijas*, appeal to the same catalogues of profeminine exemplarity, encouraging female readers to be living paradigms and placing chastity above all other virtues.

These works attacking or defending women also all concern how men should relate to women, and consequently clearly demonstrate that male comportment and courtliness are just as, and perhaps more, important in this stage of debate literature than notions of feminine behavior. Eloquence, finesse, and the ability to argue successfully on both sides of the divide were often valued over sincerity in this context. Depending upon the position of the writer and his intended audiences, woman and women are discussed either as a problem for or boon to men. As man’s “Other,” Woman may not be evil incarnate, but she is certainly not “one of us.” Nevertheless, and despite their affirmations of woman’s natural inferiority, these defenses call the authority of misogyny into question.
Teresa de Cartagena (ca. 1425–?)

Teresa de Cartagena, the author of two spiritual treatises, is one of a small group of medieval Iberian women writers whose works have come down to us. An educated woman who participated directly in the querella, she is an example of the distance between the cultural ideograms constructed by male authors in the debate and the experience of historical women.\(^3\) Teresa wrote from within the convent where she lived, though she mentions having studied at Salamanca in her first treatise, the Arboleda de los enfermos (Grove of the Infirm) (c. 1450). While the precise nature of her studies there is unknown, it was not uncommon for aristocratic women to be well educated at the time.\(^3\) Teresa was a member of the influential Cartagena and Santa María family, whose members were highly visible in the political and cultural spheres of the Trastámara courts. Her grandfather, Pablo de Santa María (c. 1350–1435), was one of the most prominent converso churchmen of his age and served as Juan II’s tutor, while her father, Pedro de Cartagena (1387–1478), was a knight of Juan’s court and later served as a counselor to both Enrique IV and the Catholic Monarchs. Her uncle, Alonso de Cartagena, was a prolific writer and influential humanist who, among his other works, translated Boccaccio’s De claris mulieribus into Spanish.

The Arboleda de enfermos is a meditation on the spiritual value of suffering, in which Teresa describes how her own suffering from deafness imposed a beneficial, if painful, isolation upon her. The ailment allowed her to focus inwardly on her spirituality, she wrote, and to “glory” in her suffering (44). The Arboleda counsels readers to accept suffering and sickness with patience and to likewise “glory generously and willingly in our sickness” because of the humility and virtuous disavowal of temporal things that they inspire (45). In the Arboleda, Teresa asserted the value of the female body as a conduit for theological reflection (Rivera Garretas: 19). Yet it is in her second treatise, the Admiraçión operum Dei (Wonder at the Works of God) (ca. 1477), that Teresa intervened in the querella. Although she wrote from the isolation of the convent and her deafness, the two treatises appear to have circulated among the same audiences that were the intended readership of the anti- and profeminine male-authored works discussed above. Both the Arboleda and the Admiraçión were dedicated to Juana de Mendoza (d. 1493), who held the important court position of camarera mayor to Isabel I and who was married to the poet and politician Gómez Manrique.\(^3\)

In the introduction to the Admiraçión, Teresa states that it was written as a response to the “wonder” (admiraçión) that the Arboleda had caused in readers unable to believe that a woman had written so admirably. Making use of many forms of topical and gendered authorial modesty, Teresa speaks of her “weak womanly understanding” (flaco mugeril entendimiento) and the “womanly text of little substance” (obra mugeril e de poca sustancia) it produced, in order to reprimand those readers who do not believe that she could have authored the Arboleda because to doubt its authorship is to doubt the mercy and divine judgment of God (86–88). Teresa goes on to explain that the gendered customs of society make her authorship seem miraculous because, from time immemorial “men have had the practice of writing books and learning and applying their learning,” and therefore it only seems natural that only men should write and unnatural in women (89). Moreover, Teresa gives her own exegesis of the creation story in Genesis, using the very Aristotelian and Scholastic oppositions of male and female to argue for the complementarity of the sexes. God did indeed make men valiant, strong, and of greater intelligence than women, but He created this “marvelous arrangement” (maravillosa dispusyçión) for the preservation of humanity (92). Furthermore, Teresa observes, citing Judith’s heroism, just as God at times graces women with extraordinary fortitude so he graced her to write (93). Using the theory of gender polarity, Teresa affirms the naturalness of women writing: “For clearly
it is more within the reach of a woman to be eloquent than strong, and more modest for her to be skilled than daring, and easier for her to use the pen than the sword” (93). Teresa de Cartagena’s *Admiración* is at once a self-defense and a defense of women’s equality in receiving God’s grace, which can confer intellectual abilities and authority. 

The second wave: the *querella* in fiction

In the later fifteenth century, several writers responded to the polemics of the first wave of the *querella* by continuing to pose “the woman question” in fiction, particularly in the tales of frustrated and tragic desire identified with the genre known as the sentimental romance. While many fictional works can be said to engage implicitly in the debate because they feature characters that confirm or counter misogynist claims that all women are reprehensible, several sentimental romances include scenes in which characters engage in formal debates and systematically present arguments from the pro- and antifeminine repertoires. In these works, written for mixed audiences of men and women, and which frame the *querella* within the imagined lives and adventures of the protagonists, the debate itself becomes a subject of analysis. The sentimental romances thus weave the *querella* into their interrogations of courtly love and explorations of the ideological conflicts inherent in the performance of masculinity and femininity.

In the anonymous *Triste deleytación*, written at some point after 1458, two female characters, La Doncella and La Madrina, review the arguments against and in defense of women during a conversation about vagaries of love and the fragility of female honor. La Doncella reports that she has only vaguely understood Rodríguez del Padrón’s defense of women in the *Triunfo* (52). La Madrina reviews the profeminine arguments and their misogynist refutations, referring to Torrellas as “our mortal enemy” (54). The conversation ends on an ambiguous and ironic note, with La Doncella remarking that her friend seems to enjoy arguing from both perspectives, rather than defend women. La Madrina, who has consistently appealed to lived experience over authority, replies in her own defense that self-evident truths must not be denied (55).

The debate takes on even greater weight in two romances that were composed at some point in the 1470s or 1480s in the context of the Isabeline court, and went on to be extremely popular in Spanish and in translation throughout Europe in the sixteenth century, Diego de San Pedro’s *Cárcel de amor* (*The Prison of Love*), first printed in 1492, and Juan de Flores’s *Grisel y Mirabella* (*Grisel and Mirabella*, known throughout Europe as *Aurelio and Isabel*), first printed in 1495. San Pedro and Flores were both courtiers and *letrados*, San Pedro in the service of the eminent Tellez Girón family, and Flores in the court of the Catholic Monarchs. The *querella* appears in both formal and allusive guises in the two romances, which stage the debates and their consequences in the courts of rulers conflicted by the mutually exclusive terms of love and justice, settings that must have clearly resonated with the political agenda of the Catholic Monarchs. Both romances allude to the political environment in which Isabel I came to power and reigned.

*Cárcel de amor* tells the story of an unsuccessful courtship. Leriano, a young nobleman is unable to be the recognized love-servant of the princess Laureola, who explains that, while she does not want him to die of lovesickness, cannot risk her honor by accepting his love. The courtship, such as it is, is carried out in a series of letters in which the *querella* is a clear intertextual reference. Laureola responds to Leriano’s complaints of lovesickness by writing that she is in an impossible position. She fears that her letters will become public and no matter how she reacts she will be the subject of slander, though she would prefer to be “vilified for her cruelty than maligned for her mercy,” that is, for favoring him with letters that can cure his suffering (28). Her words foreshadow the accusations of fornication that follow; her “mercy,” supposed to be a virtue, is
a vice in the eyes of the law (52–53). Fearing that she will be thought movible (fickle), like so many women before her, Laureola writes in her final attempt to dissuade Leriano from dying of love, that his death will cause her to be the object of further criticism (62). In her last letter to Leriano, Laureola also tries to put their relationship into a different courtly context, that of royal patronage. She asks him to wait until her father’s death, when she will presumably inherit the throne and be able to compensate him with honors and wealth (62–63).

A friend, Tefeo, drawing upon Ovidian and Boccaccian precedents, tries to cure Leriano of his lovesickness with a strong dose of antifeminine diatribe, by relating the “infinite evils of women.”48 Despite the repeated rejections that he has received from Laureola, Leriano declares that he cannot be convinced. Rather, his last words will be in praise of women and then launches into a long recitation, drawn principally from Diego de Valera’s Tratado en defensa de las virtuosas mugeres, of fifteen reasons that the maldicientes (slanderers) err in speaking ill of women, twenty reasons men are indebted to women, and a catalogue of twenty good women, including María Coronel, Isabel de las Casas, and the beata Mari García.49 Leriano concludes that men who defame women are blasphemers who besmirch their own honor (76).

In Cárcel, the discourse of misogyny is ineffective; Leriano has the last word, and thus, it would seem that the defense of women has won the day. Nevertheless, Leriano’s profeminine martyrdom seems to suggest that the consequence of defending women may be death. Cárcel’s denouement is ambiguous: is Leriano a profeminine and courtly hero to be applauded, or a failed lover whose vulnerability to women leads to his demise? Is Laureola a belle dame sans merci, who has cruelly caused the death of a valiant and nobleman, or is she the victim of a courtly code that damn her regardless of whether she unsubmitively protects her honor or acquiesces? Leriano’s rather hackneyed contribution to the querella does not solve the underlying questions asked by the romance.

In Cárcel, the formal defense of women is triggered by Tefeo’s attempt to cure Leriano through misogyny; the querella is a rhetorical set piece performed by Leriano, inserted as a parenthesis in the plot. In Grisel y Mirabella, dedicated to an unnamed lady assumed to be Isabel I herself, a fictional trial pitting men against women reduces the debate to a single question: do men seduce women, and are they thereby guilty for women’s sins, or is it the other way around? The trial is ordered by a king who wishes to set a precedent after his council is unable to determine who to blame when the knight Grisel and the princess Mirabella are discovered in flagrante. The king commissions Torrellas, here resuscitated as a fictional character, to argue on the behalf of men, and Braçayda, a character from medieval retellings of the Trojan War to oppose him.

Braçayda bases her defense, like many a combatant in the querella before her, on women’s relative weakness, to which she adds women’s lack of discursive power in a world where men control access to knowledge and the legal system. However, Braçayda is not so much making the case for women as making a case against men and Torrellas. As the weaker, less educated, less discreet, less knowing half of humanity, women cannot be at fault in cases of sexual seduction, Braçayda avers. Consequently, women cannot force men to engage in sexual relations, while men can easily force women (110–113, 120–121). As the powerless subjects of male control, she argues, women cannot be to blame if they are easily led to sin by men. Virtue, Braçayda contends, is no benefit to women, because men will slander even the most virtuous of women, and women would rather sin in secret than be lambasted in public (120–121). Perhaps the most interesting rhetorical move Braçayda makes in the trial occurs when she converts the topos of the “power of women” as irresistible seducers into the “power of men,” whose attractions and wiles can neither be denied nor resisted. Women, she argues, are unable to resist men’s persuasive speech, letters, musical performances, and even their looks (110–113, 118–119). Torrellas responds to each of Braçayda’s arguments by restating and amplifying all of the slurs found in his Maldezir.
He adds that should women one day be freed from the restraints of shame, they would pursue and seduce men just as avidly as men do women, a vision that Flores develops in another romance that draws upon the querella, *Triunfo de amor* (*The Triumph of Love*) (114–115). Torrellas is declared the victor of the trial. Mirabella, and by extension, all women are condemned.

Braçayda’s most forceful statements interrogate the very nature of the debate. Echoing the famous question posed by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, “who painted the lion?” (v.692), Braçayda declares, “for, in our ignorance, we have no one to write in our favor, while you men, who hold pen in hand, can say whatever you want” (126–127). After women are found guilty, Braçayda also protests the fundamental futility of trying to defend women when the outcome of the trial, despite all the trappings of a fair hearing, was predetermined, since men wrote the laws to their own advantage. The laws, she proclaims, “condemn the ravished victim to death—and [say] long live the rapist!” (138–139).

Braçayda also takes aim at the rhetoric and posturing of courtly love, chiding men for their hyperbolic complaints of melancholy, torture, and “dying of love,” defaming women who reciprocate their love and women who refuse it alike. As in Cárcel, in *Grisel y Mirabella*, the figurative term of “dying of love” becomes literal. Both Grisel and Mirabella commit suicide: Grisel throws himself into the bonfire to save Mirabella from the death to which she is condemned, while Mirabella throws herself into a pit of lions, unable to face life without Grisel. Torrellas, having become infatuated with Braçayda, is lured to his death at the hands of all the angry women of the court, who tear the woman-hater apart, recalling the murder of Orpheus by a horde of Bacchae in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

Braçayda’s speeches in *Grisel y Mirabella*, much like Christine de Pizan’s objections to Matheolus and Teresa de Cartagena’s appeal to theological authority, move beyond the discursive bounds of profeminine defenses to question the structural misogyny at work in patriarchal society. Yet, the accusations leveled at women in Torrellas’s *Maldezir* would also seem to be proved by his violent death at the hands of all the angry women of the court, who tear the woman-hater apart, recalling the murder of Orpheus by a horde of Bacchae in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

Cárcel and *Grisel* are fictional explorations of the case for and against women and their material consequences. If, in Cárcel, Leriano dies convinced by the profeminine arguments of the debate, in *Grisel*, Torrellas dies as a result of his triumph on the misogynist side; in each text, the debaters reach a conclusion, but the debate itself remains inconclusive. While Mirabella is cut from the same cloth as some of the heroines in the profeminine catalogues, and willingly dies as proof of her steadfast love, Laureola, the royal writer, and Braçayda, the vengeful debater, are less easy to place. The debate changes substantially when it is embedded in these late medieval fictions because, unlike the tendentious treatises and verses of the first wave of the querella, *Triste deleytación, Cárcel de amor*, and *Grisel y Mirabella*, are dialogic, humanist fictions that not only present multiple viewpoints and imagine various lived experiences, but also encourage readers to continue the protagonists’ questioning of the status quo and the nature of the querella itself.

Fifteenth-century writers enjoyed a veritable rhetorical arsenal of commonplaces for arguing, on the one hand, in the defense of women and, on the other, for proving the superiority of the male sex and the iniquity of women. For the male writers of the first wave of the querella, to pose the “woman question” was a form of begging the question, since the answer was a foregone conclusion. Wisdom and conduct literature written for men, such as *Bocados de oro*, or the *Arcipreste de Talavera* present woman as category to be mastered and a figure to be avoided in the interests of men’s health and honor. *Cancionero* poetry and the profeminine treatises written in the middle decades of the fifteenth-century, in turn, explore the rhetorical possibilities and

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the courtly posturing available to men arguing in the defense and defamation of women and love. Teresa de Cartagena took the challenge a step further by playing upon the difference between natural, sexually differentiated bodies and the God-given equality of intellectual potential. Fiction, unlike the polemical works, placed the querella within dialogic frames that bring the act of debating under scrutiny while also imagining women taking active and authoritative roles as orators and writers, providing contesting images and counter narratives to those excluding women from public speech and from taking up the pen.

Socrates’ quip, equating a woman’s intellectual pursuits with the compounding of evil, is an apt trope with which to begin a discussion of the discursive background concerning the nature and proper behavior of women from which the writers considered throughout this volume emerged, for it concisely demonstrates how discourses of cultural authority defined women by their exclusion from learning. What is more, the images of women offered by the querella provided historical women writers, such as Teresa de Cartagena, material in relation to which they might engage in literary acts of self-fashioning and reflection upon women’s roles as authors, and as the agents rather than the objects of discourse. Allusions to the querella abound in late medieval and early modern literature. Later authors, María de Zayas and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, to name just two notable examples, inherited and extended the querella tradition, adding more women’s voices to the defense. Their acts of writing were acts “opposing cultural hierarchies, mappings, and orthodoxies of gendered spaces, roles and belief,” as Amanda Powell and Stacy Schlau describe the cultural production of early modern and colonial women (48). Within the horizons of expectation of their varied genres, the foundational querella texts all respond to the misalignments between gender orthodoxy and experience. This indeterminacy did not end with the fifteenth century. The texts of the querella enjoyed a lasting cultural presence, and their influence can be clearly felt throughout the early modern period.

Notes

1 On the history and usage of the term “querelle des femmes,” see Zimmerman, “The ‘Querelle des Femmes’ as a Cultural Studies Paradigm,” which recaps and reflects upon a prior essay, co-authored with Bock, “Die Querelle des Femmes in Europa.”

2 Some scholars consider the querelle a coherent, European tradition lasting from the fourteenth century until the French Revolution, while others define its parameters as spanning from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, encompassing all texts from Europe and the Americas that comment upon the nature and status of women. Kelly asserted the existence of a coherent tradition in her groundbreaking article “Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes, 1400–1789.” Benson, on the other hand, argues for the consideration of separate medieval and Renaissance querelles (“Querelle des femmes”). A broad, transatlantic definition guides the approaches of the series La Querella de las mujeres, edited by Segura, and the anthology La Querella de Mujeres en Europa e Hispanoamérica, ed. Ramírez Almazán et al.

3 The querella in Iberia extended beyond works composed in Spanish such as Eiximenis’s Libre de les dones (1396) and Jaime Roig’s Spill (c. 1460), which lie beyond the scope of this essay. For a descriptive bibliography of the querella see Weiss, “Bibliography of Primary Texts.” For numerous excerpts, see Archer, ed. Misoginia y defensa de las mujeres, which also includes biblical, classical, and sixteenth-century examples. For an anthology of European querelle texts, see Blamires, ed. Woman Defamed. Campbell’s “The Querelle des femmes” provides an excellent introduction to the state of scholarship on the querelle in the English, French, and Italian contexts.

4 “Una forma de intervenir en la Querella, de crear opinión en el mundo, de hacer política.”

5 See, for example, studies by Archer, Francomano, Lacarra, Muñoz-Fernández, Rivera Garretas, Solomon, Vargas Martínez, Vélez-Sainz, Weissberger, Weiss, and Zimmerman listed in the bibliography. For the broader European context see, for example, Kolsky, Stanton, and Warner.

6 “Non ha […] peor mal que la muger […] E vió a una muger enferma que se non podie mover en su lecho, e dixo: El mal queda con el mal […] E vido una moça que deprendié escrevir, e dixo:
Non acrescientes el mal con el mal.” Bocados de oro, a compendium of advice and sayings of philosophers intended to mold the conduct and beliefs of its inscribed male readers, was first compiled in the thirteenth century and circulated throughout the fifteenth. The observation about women learning to read must have been important for the book’s compilers, because a few lines later, Socrates repeats the sentiment: “E vio una moça que aprendie escrevir, e dixo: Añades al escurpión vegranbre sobre su vegranbre” (And he saw a young woman who was learning to write, and he said, ‘you are adding poison to the scorpion’s poison) (64).

7 On humoral theory and its importance for medieval and early modern ideas of gender classification, see Paster.

8 Aristotle and Virgil figure frequently among the ranks of such enamored sages. On “the power of women,” topos see Smith.

9 In order to avoid imposing anachronistic political and philosophical constructs upon pre-modern works, here feminist and the related terms pro- and proto-feminist are not used. Rather, for the sake of conciseness, misogynist and antifeminine are used as catchalls to refer to those texts and authorial stances that express hatred of women (misogyny), fear of women (gynophobia or horror feminae), and the rejection of marriage (misogamy). The term profeminine is used to refer to those texts and authors that defend women in response to misogynist attacks by praising femininity and feminine virtues, as traditionally defined. On the term profeminine, see Blamires, The Case of Women 11–12.

10 On the formation and institutionalization of Aristotelian sex polarity, see Allen. On the relation between Aristotelian sex polarity and changing legal customs in the later middle ages, see Stuard. On humanistic responses to the Aristotelian revolution and their relation to the querella, see Rivera Garretas.

11 Conduct literature for women also frequently cites the biblical verses in praise of the good wife in order to instruct readers how to emulate her. For example, Fray Luis de León’s La perfecta casada is an extended gloss on the biblical mujer de valor.


14 On the connections between the Arapispre de Talavera and other misogynist texts of the fifteenth century and men’s health, see Solomon. On the “religion of love” and its relationship to the literature of misogyny, see Gerli, “La ‘religión del amor.’ ” For further study on theories of love in the period, see Cátedra, Amor y pedagogía and Tratados de amor.

15 “Non han número nin cuento, nin escrevir se podrían, como de cada día el que con las mugeres platicare, verá cosas en ellas incognitas, nuevas e nunca escriptas, vistas nin sabidas” (64). The English translation, titled Little Sermons on Sin, is by Lesley Byrd Simpson.

16 “Envidiosa ser la muger mala dubdar en ello sería pecar en el Espíritu Santo: por cuanto toda muger, quandoquier que ve otra de sí más fermosa, de envidia se quiere morir” (160).

17 “Desque adormido comencé de soñar que sobre mí veía señoras meas de mill . . . de nombre e renombre famosas” (305). Translation by the author. Little Sermons on Sin does not reproduce the epilogue.

18 “¡Guay del ombre que solo duerme con dolor de axaqueca e en su casa rueca nunca entra todo el año!”

19 “Quien bien amando persigue / dona, a si mismo destruye.”

20 “Mujer es un animal / que se diz’ hombre imperfecto, / procreado en el defecto / del buen calor natural.”

21 “Sintiendo que son subjectas / e sin nengund poderío, / a fin de aver señorío / tienen engañosas sectas.”

22 “Aquesta es la condición / de las mugeres comuna.”

23 One reason that the verses were scandalous in the eyes of many of Torrellas’s fifteenth-century readers was his importation of the misogynist repertoire of women’s faults into context of courtly poetry (Archer, “Las coplas”).

24 Dutton and Krogstad provide the texts of all known versions of the Maldezir as well as of the poetic responses to Torrellas in El cancionero del siglo XV, ca. 1360–1520, 7 vols. The poems are also available on the University of Liverpool, UK, website, “An Electronic Corpus of 15th Century Castilian Cancionero Manuscripts,” http://cancionerovirtual.liv.ac.uk

25 “Los fidalgos han de ser / defensa de las mujeres.”

26 “Uno de los plazeres del paraño”; “el ombre peccó de cierta sabiduría, e la muger por engaño e por ignorancia.”
27 “Las donas deven regir e batallar quando conviene, segund que los onbres, los quales por tiranía el regimiento tienen occupado.”
28 “Parece claro aue seido mayor número el de los malos onbres, et mayor el de las buenas mugeres.”
29 “Aquestos començadores de nueva seta, que rotamente les plaze en general de todas las mugeres maldezir.
E pues tanto te agrada saberlo, comoquier triste me sea exerçer la torpe mano en tan orrible materia [. . .] soy cierto que, vistas por ti sus conclusiones, ligeramente anchilarás su opinión.”
30 “Los coraçones de los tales así son ligeros como las fojas de los árboles, que todo viento las mueve.”
31 As Glenda McLeod observes in her study of catalogues of good and bad women, the concatenation of examples provided historically authorized definitions of women by creating the sense “a general consensus [. . .] based on a culture’s written legacy” (3).
32 “Non como hembra los lugares escondidos buscó nin las leyes de paz demandó, mas con viril coraçón dexionado los femíneos apostamientos, governadora e regidora en las batallas con gran vigor se mostró.”
33 “Ya Dios, ¿pues qué çeguedad es esta, que así ocupa la vista de los mortales? ¿puede ser cosa más virtuosa que aquellas que la natura crio cuerpos flacos, coraçones tiernos, comúnmente ingenio perezoso, ser fâlladas en muchas virtudes antepuestas a los varones, a quien por don natural fue otorgado cuerpos valientes, diligente ingenio, coraçones duros?”
34 Luna promoted Juan II’s second marriage in 1447 to Isabel of Portugal, mother of the future Queen Isabel I. However, Luna and Isabel entered into conflict, leading to Luna’s eventual execution. A copy of the Libro de las virtuosas y claras mugeres appears in the inventory of Queen Isabel I’s books and may have come down to her through her mother. Abby McGovern suggests that the omission of contemporary women from the Libro is intended as a veiled criticism of Queen María.
35 On medieval women writers see Deyermond and Surtz, Writing Women. For early modern women writers who participated in the querella see Ramírez Alamzán et al., and Segura Graiño, ed., La Querella de las Mujeres I. Análisis de textos.
36 See Nader: 6, and Howe.
37 “Si liberalmente y de buen grado nos gloriaremos en nuestras enfermedades, porque more en nuestras ánmas la virtut de Cristo” (62). English translations of Arboleda and the Admiración are from Seidenspinner-Núñez, The Writings of Teresa de Cartagena.
38 Surtz, “In Search of Juana de Mendoza.”
39 “La causa porque los varones se maravillan que muger aya hecho tractado es por no ser acostumbrado en el estadío fimíneo, más solamente en el varonil. Ca los varones hazer libros e aprender çiençias, e vsar dellas [. . .] parece ser acudi oir baatural curso” (115).
40 “Que manifiesto es que más a mano viene a la henbra ser eloquente que no ser fuerte, e más onesto la es ser entendida que no osada, e más ligera cosa le será usar de la péñola que de la espada” (120).
41 For further analysis of the works of Teresa de Cartagena and ample bibliographic references, see Kim, Between Desire and Passion and El saber femenino, and Seidenspinner-Núñez, “Introduction” and “Interpretive Essay.”
42 Deliberation about the very existence and parameters of the genre is ongoing, but there is a general consensus, at least in practice, among critics that a series of short, formally hybrid stories about unrequited or tragic love, produced between 1440 and 1550, form the genre.
43 Blamires distinguishes between works that make “formal,” or systematically presented contributions to the debate on women, and those that make “incidental” contributions by referencing debate commonplaces (The Case for Women 9).
44 “Nuestro amigo mortal”; Rodríguez del Padrón is lauded as “aquel más virtuoso de todos los hombres” (52).
45 “Quien la verdad del todo niega, atorga más la mentira, porque cosas hay que no se pueden decir el contrario, por tener los fines y evidencias muy ciertos.”
46 See Weissberger 219–21, and Gerli “Conflictive Subjectivity.”
47 “Aféada por cruel que amanzillada por piadosa.”
48 “Infinidos males de las mugeres.”
49 According to Cárcel de amor, Isabel de las Casas is exemplary because even though she never married Pedro Girón, the father of her illustrious sons, she refused to marry any other man and died as a chaste widow and signs of sanctity attended her death.
50 “Porque en nuestra simplicidad no ay quien scriva en favor nuestro. Y vosotros que tenéis la pluma en la mano: pintáis como queréis.”
51 “Quieren que muera la que es forçada y viva el forçador.”
Works cited

Primary works

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