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Between Desire and Passion. Teresa de Cartagena by Kim
Yonsoo (review)

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*La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures,
and Cultures*, Volume 45, Number 1, Fall 2016, pp. 157-167 (Review)

Published by *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages,
Literatures, and Cultures*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cor.2016.0028>

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To sum up, much work remains to be done, and I have expressed my doubts about a number of details, but this does not detract from the fact that we ought all to feel indebted to Laura Delbrugge for her path-breaking work.

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Yonsoo, Kim. Between Desire and Passion. Teresa de Cartagena. The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World, 48. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. x + 185 pp. ISBN 9789004212510.

The words that open this volume give a good idea of its purpose: “This book aims to introduce the fifteenth-century Spanish writer Teresa de Cartagena (ca.1425-?) to a wider audience as well as to offer new interpretations of her writings” (1). It is certainly necessary to bring her life and works to the attention of all those non-Hispanist scholars who study late medieval female literature, since she is, largely and sadly, conspicuously absent in general studies exploring the territory of women’s writing in that period of European history. Teresa de Cartagena, and her works, certainly deserve this.

The first chapter of the book, “Writing to survive and heal: Teresa de Cartagena’s life and works” (11-34) is a short biography of Cartagena, followed by some considerations on physical impairment in general, and deafness in particular. In its biographical part, the chapter largely summarizes the state of knowledge about Cartagena’s life at the time of publication, so adds little to Seidenspinner-Núñez and Kim (2004). As such, the chapter is useful and informative. There are, however, some mistakes and hurried statements. Saying that “Don Pablo [de Santa María] arranged for his children to marry the highest nobles of Castile” (13) is certainly exaggerated. The tomb of Alonso de Cartagena is not “located today” (does this mean that in the past it was located elsewhere?) “in the Cathedral of Burgos, in the first chapel upon entering the main portal” (13n12); it is instead in the Capilla de la Visitación, to the left as one enters the cathedral through the Puerta del Sarmental, which is not the main portal of the cathedral (this being

the Puerta de Santa María). Some other errors are clearly *lapsus calami*, such as saying that Teresa was the cousin of Alfonso de Cartagena (19), rather than his niece (as correctly said elsewhere in the book). As is it happens, new documentary evidence now allows us to know more about Teresa de Cartagena's life; specifically, it allows us to question one of the few well-documented elements in her biography, namely her transfer in 1449, or very shortly thereafter, from the convent of the Clares in Burgos to a Cistercian convent, presumably in the same city, normally thought to be the Monasterio de Santa María la Real de las Huelgas. This is not the place to examine the matter in detail, so I refer those interested to my forthcoming edition of Teresa de Cartagena's works, where I present and analyze the documents that show our author still in the convent of the Clares in Burgos at least until November 2, 1452. Overall, this chapter is effective in providing the reader with basic information regarding the biography of Teresa de Cartagena and the social consideration of deafness in medieval times. However, I am afraid that it exaggerates rather significantly when it says that "Seidenspinner-Núñez and Kim's study at last gave Teresa the place she deserved in the history of Spanish literature, and their findings confirmed that she was indeed, a deaf, *conversa*, and woman writer of medieval Castile" (34). Teresa de Cartagena's place in the history of Spanish literature was certainly already granted –and quite literally– by Amador de los Ríos (176-78) and later by Alan Deyermond, among others. The fact that she was a *conversa*, and a member of the Santa María-Cartagena family, was actually confirmed by Cantera Burgos (441, 537-38), as Kim acknowledges (15); the fact that she was deaf and a woman writer is unequivocally expressed in her own works and of course needs no confirmation whatsoever. Last, to speak of "findings" is also a tad exaggerated, if we remember that the documents cited from the Vatican archives were published almost fifty years ago by Beltrán de Heredia (39-41), and used already by Frieden (40-41) to discern aspects of Cartagena's life.

The second chapter, "Writing with traditional discourses" (35-50), begins by surveying the ideas that configure the medical discourses on illness and healing from Classical antiquity and into the Christian medieval tradition (35-40). This has limited relevance for understanding *Arboleda de los enfermos*, since the work deals with illness, its theological justification, and its benefits for the faithful, but not with healing: its scope is thus theological rather than medical. Since Kim never states that all the works and authors surveyed in this chapter have any influence on the ideas and topics in *Arboleda*, their pertinence is really not clear. There is one important element, though, in these pages, namely the idea, cited

from “Rome 5:3” [sic], that “Tribulation produces patience” (39), and the idea that patience is indispensable in order to suffer sickness and physical pain (38). Romans 5:3 is an important biblical locus, given the crucial role that patience plays in *Arboleda* and the fact that it is explicitly (though indirectly) quoted by Cartagena herself, although Kim does not elaborate on this. Some considerations about medical practices for women follow (41-45), although this reviewer fails to see their relevance for the study of Cartagena’s life and work. Following this come a few pages on the importance that physical suffering had in shaping female spirituality in the Middle Ages, especially in its association with mystical and visionary experiences (45-50). Again, and given that Teresa de Cartagena was not a mystic or a visionary (as earlier established; 11-12), it is difficult to see how the information contained in these pages is pertinent. It may, but *a contrario*: the “traditional discourse” (Kim’s coinage) of mystic, visionary women writers in the Middle Ages –such as Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden, Angela de Foligno, and “Julian of Northwich” [sic]– was defined by the writing of visions that they had in their mystical experiences and by their own interpretations of these, frequently under close inspection from their spiritual directors or confessors (47, 49). On the other hand, what Teresa de Cartagena mostly does as a writer is to deploy the “traditional discourse” of medieval Castilian spiritual literature, written almost exclusively by male authors. All readers of Cartagena know that this is precisely the origin of all the problems that required her to write her second work, the *Admiración Operum Dei*. In my view, this chapter fails to build, as it claims (50), a conceptual, historical, and intellectual framework that helps to better understand Cartagena’s works.

The third chapter, “Writing to Alleviate and Understand: First Part of *Arboleda de los Enfermos*” (51-82), aims to elucidate the “organic structure and thematic unity” (51) of *Arboleda*, and specifically its first part, which can be seen as a literary *consolatio* that presents the benefits of illness based on Teresa de Cartagena’s own personal experience and as seen through a number of biblical loci on which the author grounds her discourse. It is an informative chapter, if somewhat circular and reiterative, with a tendency to paraphrase Cartagena’s text. It also presents some errors. It includes a “map” (54) that aims to depict the structure of *Arboleda*; according to Kim, this shows clear correspondences with the main categories of the *artes dictaminis* and *artes sermocinandi*. The map fails to show this correspondence, in addition to being almost invisible to the naked eye. It would take too long to discuss its flaws in full, so I will discuss here only one of its

sections, dispensing here with its tabular presentation in Kim's book, but keeping the exact words used inside the cells of the table. Kim (54) divides the second part of *Arboleda*, dealing with patience, into four sections, organized thus:

- 1) Patience = peace + wisdom (*paz + ciencia*)
  - i) Sufferer be prudent and wise
- 2) Sufferer...
  - i) ...receives five talents
  - ii) ...with prudence and wisdom receives another five talents
- 3) Cardinal virtues
- 4) Theological virtues

Kim makes these sections correspond to the six classical parts of the *artes sermocinandi*, but in a loose way, without direct connections of any sort. In fact, the second part of *Arboleda* has a very different internal structure, as I see it: the section on patience opens with consideration of the “trabajos de mala parte” (ed. Hutton, 64-65) and the “trabajos de buena parte” (66-67) that people must endure through patience, and the specific features of each. The “dolencias” fall into this second category. Following this is a section that discusses two types of patience, “bueno” (67-68) and “mejor” (68-95), the second exemplified with an interpretation of the parable of the five talents (called “marcos” here). An enumeration and description of the five talents in question ensues (69-95), these being:

- i) “amor singular” (where definitions of *padesçer voluntario* and *padesçer forçible* are included)
- ii) “dolencia” (which heals “siete hiebras” too numerous to detail here)
- iii) “mortificación” (which can affect physical strengths as well as thoughts)
- iv) “humillación e desprecio”
- v) the time that illness takes away from the sick people (which, as this particular section says, provides remedy to existing issues and prevents future ones)

This very long section on the “mejor” type of patience closes with one of the few internal divisions explicitly made in the text by means of *ad hoc* discourse markers (ed. Hutton 95-96). Immediately after this, there is a section on Job, called the “Master of Patiences”, as an example of perfect patience. Finally comes a last

section that discusses the place of patience among the virtues: it is not a cardinal or a theological virtue, nor one of the seven virtues opposed to the seven deadly sins, but a class of its own, founded on the four cardinal virtues and rising towards the three theological ones. The demonstration of this special status of patience among the virtues closes *Arboleda*. It is easy to see that there is no correspondence between the analysis of the structure of the work suggested by Kim and its real structure. This evidence completely eliminates the grounds for the connections made by Kim between the structure of *Arboleda* and the *artes dictaminis* or the *artes sermocinandi* (54-56), although this of course does not mean that there are no traces or influences of the *artes sermocinandi* in *Arboleda*: there certainly are, and Cartagena explicitly mentions her experiences listening to sermons in different parts of her works. The presence of the *artes dictaminis* in her works is, in my view, nil. In addition to this, according to Kim's map there is a "conclusion" in *Arboleda*, when actually there is no such a thing, *Arboleda* ends where and when the section on patience concludes. Such a disparity between the evidence provided by the text and the analysis presented by Kim is a matter for serious concern. Likewise, Kim does not seem to realize that *Arboleda* does have a prologue:

In the first part of Teresa de Cartagena's treatise, she describes her particular circumstances and motivations for writing *Arboleda*. But in the following section, her treatise takes on a different tone. After quoting [Psalm 32:9] in Latin ... the text reveals a pedagogical-consolatory aim, with the author underscoring her own experience of the process of understanding. In this new segment, she separates herself from the theme of her argument and reflects on her situation. (67-68)

This appreciation is correct, but not surprising: the so-called "first part" is in fact the text's prologue, in which Cartagena explains, to an unidentified "virtuosa señora", her circumstances and purpose in writing *Arboleda*, and the so-called "following section" is actually the beginning of the treatise: hence the change in voice and tone.

This analysis of the structure of *Arboleda* is not the only point where one must disagree, not simply with the author's interpretations, but also with her literal understanding, of certain parts of the text. In her third chapter, Kim analyses the beginning of the prologue of *Arboleda* and the spatial metaphor used there by Cartagena, who mentions "vna ýnsula que se llama 'Oprobrium hominum et abieçio plebis', donde tantos años ha que en ella biuo, si vida llamar se puede", a life that she labels as "exillyo e tenebroso destierro" (ed. Hutton 37). Kim

subsequently states: “Teresa allegorically portrays her life in the convent as living on an island. She refers to this image of an island and expands on the torments that afflict her spirit, beginning with her deafness. Her illness confined her to that ‘exillyo e tenebroso destierro’” (59). It is clear that the exile mentioned in fact refers metaphorically to how deafness affected her life, but it is also crystal-clear that the reference to the island –called “a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Ps. 22:6)– refers to how deafness shaped her life, not to her life in convent. What took her to that island was “vn espeso toruellino de angustiosas pasyones” (ed. Hutton 37), where of course *pasyones* means “illnesses”. There is no textual evidence whatsoever that allows us to read this grim island as a metaphor for her conventual life and even less for stating, as Kim does, that Teresa de Cartagena was “confronted with discrimination and marginalization in her convent” (59, and reiterated on page 60). In this regard, the documents that I have recently discovered in the Convento de Santa Clara in Burgos help to dispel this image of a Teresa de Cartagena marginalized and harassed in the convent: for a number of years she was one of the *monjas discretas* of that convent, the group of nuns who provided advice to the abbess, and so, far from being ostracized, a key participant in the life of its community. Regarding her life in other convents (if it is the case that she transferred to the Huelgas Reales in Burgos, which is likely, but not sure), the fact that she could write her works; maintain communication with people like Juana de Mendoza and Juana’s husband Gómez Manrique, as the prologue of *Admiración* attests; and that she enjoyed a degree of communication with the external world, as certain passages of *Arboleda* show (ed. Hutton 39, lines 6-7 and 41, lines 31-35, among others), would be proof that her life within her conventual community was not marked by harassment and marginalization. It is time to drop the misconception of considering that Teresa de Cartagena was mistreated in any way during her years as a nun. There is no evidence to support such a claim.

Chapter three later examines, but with remarkable shallowness, the possible influences of Ramon Llull on Teresa de Cartagena, suggested by Hutton in the introductory study to his edition (24-26). Only one passage from *Blanquerna* is considered, on the topic of the grove as a place to get good advice, which *Arboleda* calls “Arboledas de buenos consejos y espirituales consolaciones” or “Arboledas saludables” (ed. Hutton 38). The Lullian passage does not, in my opinion, present special similarities with any passage in *Arboleda*; Kim thinks otherwise, though without elaborating. But what I must disagree with most is one of her statements on this matter: “Conceivably Llull was a topic of

conversation between Teresa's grandfather, and other *conversos*. Marcel Bataillon describes how the *Iluminati* [sic] movement had its origin in Jewish conversos who became Franciscans" (64). Of course, the presence of Lull in conversations between Pablo de Santa María and other *conversos* is pure speculation, so I fail to see how this could be put forward to justify Lullian presences in the work of Teresa de Cartagena, especially if we consider that she was probably only ten or twelve years old when her grandfather died! Kim offers a swooping generalization that is, at the same time, vague, inaccurate, and irrelevant to the matter being discussed. This lack of precision, absence of proof, non-existent justification of assertions, and constant use of broad generalizations sadly occurs too often in this book. Use of the term *illuminati* to designate the *iluminados* and *alumbrados* is also unfortunate because it doesn't make sense to designate the members of an eminently vernacular movement with a Latin term, although I know this is not Kim's responsibility, and that the Latin term has been used in the past to label the members of this spiritual movement. However, the author seems to struggle with Latin at several points, such as *consolati* (57n19) for *consolationes*; *Docto Illminatus* (63) in reference to Ramon Lull; *exordio* (132), for *exordium*; and a passage from *Arboleda* where Psalm 32:9 is quoted in Latin as *aproma[n]t [a]d te* (67, twice), citing Hutton's edition, which in fact reads "aproxima[n]t [a]d te" (40).

Chapter four, "Writing to Instruct and Illuminate: Second Part of *Arboleda de los Enfermos*" (83-106) deals with the section in which Teresa de Cartagena examines the importance of the virtue of patience, especially for those who are sick or infirm. Kim provides here an analysis of how Cartagena creates a discourse less focused on personal experience of the illness that she had, and more on elaboration of contents that can be labeled as doctrinal or theological advice about the benefits provided by illness and about the right way to face it. Kim correctly highlights the importance that rhetorical strategies and allegorical techniques have in this part of *Arboleda* (92-94, for instance), especially those related to basic medical images and concepts (93-98). Kim also rightly emphasizes how Teresa de Cartagena displays the scope of her theological knowledge, expressed in numerous quotes from the Bible and the Fathers of the Church (98-101). In doing so, she created "an orthodox Christian voice" (98), which, I add, would not have been too different from one produced by a male writer. The pages of this chapter are certainly among the best of the volume. Unfortunately, this chapter also contains misreadings of Teresa de Cartagena's

text. For example, Kim cites one of the many protestations made by Cartagena regarding her lack of knowledge and intellectual skills to write about her subject:

paresçe asaz conuiniente cosa hablar de cada vno dellos sy la facultad de mi pobre juyzio bastase; mas por verdat dezir, con *tan* menguada discreción los he sabido nonbrar, que para los discernir y declarar, mal guarnida me veo asý de la theórica como de la plática. Pero syguiendo más la devoçión [que la] sciencia, y más me auisando la pasyón que la discreción, diré *aquello* que Dios por su ynfinita *misericordia* a mi synpleza administrar quisyere. (ed. Hutton 70)

Kim concludes that here our author “declares that the explanation that follows does not belong to her *ingenio mugeril*, rather to the authority administered by divine grace” (89). This is not so; there is no contraposition in the passage between “pobre juyzio” and what “Dios por su ynfinita misericordia a mi synpleza administrar quisyere”, both refer to the same thing. What Teresa de Cartagena is saying is equivalent to the Spanish expression “lo que Dios me da a entender”, meaning “lo que buenamente pueda” or “the best I can do or say”. She is not referring to any authority, illumination or operation of the divine Grace; she is not “elevat[ing] humility to self-empowerment” (89).

Chapter five, “Writing to Give Voice: Defense of Women” (107-30) provides the background to chapter six. It presents brief overviews of different issues more than familiar to any medievalist: the *querelle des femmes* and the rise of feminine writing in Europe (108-17), women writers in medieval Spain (117-25), and the debate between pro-feminine and misogynistic writers in fifteenth-century Castile (125-30). There is nothing original in this chapter for scholars of medieval Iberia to sink their teeth into, but unquestionably these pages can be of interest for students. There are a few disconcerting issues in this chapter, such as: the mention of Marie de France among the female authors of mystical writings in medieval Europe (112); the surprising consideration of *Celestina* among the misogynistic texts of the 15th century (126), which seems a gross oversimplification of Rojas’ work; and the idea that Constanza de Castilla, together with Leonor López de Córdoba, Teresa de Cartagena and Sor Isabel de Villena, were “women [who] experienced anguish in their lives and they expressed their afflictions and sorrows in their writings with varying degrees of intensity” (119), an idea which only is feasible if we take Constanza’s *Libro de devociones y oficios* to mark some sort of “degree zero” of this kind of expression, given its noticeable lack of personal element. This chapter is, clearly, among the less interesting of the book.

The last chapter of the book, “Writing with Irony: Defense of Woman’s Voice and Discourse in *Admiración Operum Dey*” (131-57) analyzes the second work by Teresa de Cartagena, a response to the criticism and derision with which *Arboleda* was greeted by both “prudentes varones e asý mesmo henbras discretas” (ed. Hutton 113). Kim analyses how Cartagena subverts, from within a male discourse, the social and intellectual predominance of men in society and the subordination of women to them in all fronts. Kim rightly points out how Cartagena very effectively (and very intelligently) uses irony to achieve this, and how she uses theological arguments, biblical quotes and other authoritative arguments to make clear how and why she was able to write a treatise, something usually done only by men. The chapter opens, like chapter three, with a chart that aims to reflect the structure of *Admiración*, and to illustrate how discursive structures defined and implemented by the *artes dictaminis* somewhat shape the work (132). The argument is not persuasive, and Kim does not pursue it seriously. She writes, with reference to the canonical parts of letters in the *artes dictaminis* (*salutatio*, *exordium*, *narratio*, *petitio* and *conclusio*): “My analysis of this second treatise does not aim to investigate how the author employs these parts of the letter –since I have already done this for *Arboleda*– but it intends to highlight certain appropriations and tactics Teresa uses” (132). First, I cannot see how the presence, implementation or use of a structural plan from the *artes dictaminis* in *Arboleda* would replace an analysis of its presence in *Admiración*, as if the structure of one work would be inevitably projected in the other. Second, and given that, as I said earlier, Kim’s analysis of the presence of the categories from the *artes dictaminis* (and from the *artes praedicandi*) in *Arboleda* is not at all persuasive, we must reach the conclusion that *Admiración* is not shaped by these categories. This would be absolutely right, because, as it happens, the structural disposition of the latter work is completely unrelated to them. Kim’s insistence in conducting her analysis of the work following these *partes dictaminales* actually undermines some of the points she makes (134-35, for example), since the textual evidence has to be forced to fit that frame.

Nonetheless, the analysis that Kim makes of *Admiración* is, overall, correct. She notes the two most salient features of this work: its author’s clever use of irony, although sometimes she sees irony where I don’t think it exists (138-39); and her ability to use perfectly orthodox and authoritative arguments to reach conclusions that were certainly not so orthodox, such as her claim that men and women are equal. Still, there are a few weak points: the characterization of Juana de Mendoza (135-36), the person to whom Teresa de Cartagena dedicated *Admiración*, is not

as precise as it could have been had Kim perused the pages of Cátedra's *Liturgia, poesía y teatro* (31-126), in which there are abundant references to the connections of the Manrique family with some convents in the province of Palencia, such as Astudillo and Calabazanos, and with the devotional circles associated with them.

In the bibliographical apparatus of this book it is regrettable to find many references peppered with mistakes. Di Camillo's *El humanismo castellano del siglo XV* was not published by "Doménech" (13n12, 165), but rather by Fernando Torres. There are typos in some publication places and publishers, such as "Exeder" (121n49, twice); "Muquel-Rius" (123n56); "Castilla" for "Castalia" in the reference to "Beltrán, Luis", which should appear before, not after, "Beltrán de Heredia, Vicente" (164); "Holt: New York" should be "New York: Holt" in the two references under "Bernstein, Basil" (164). The reference for Hutton's edition of the works of Teresa de Cartagena (under "Cartagena, Teresa de") indicates "Anejo XVI" without fully citing the series as "Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia Española" (165). Under "Castilla, Constanza de", we find "Constante L. Wilkins" as editor of the *Libro de devociones y oficios*, and "Devon" (instead of Exeter) as the place of publication (166). The "*Journal of Hispanic Philosophy*" cited in the reference to Deyermond's 1976 article must be, of course, "*Journal of Hispanic Philology*" (167); the citation of Deyermond's volume on medieval literature in the *Historia y Crítica de la Literatura Española* directed by Francisco Rico and published by Editorial Crítica is incomplete (167). This is a small sample of the many errors of this kind that the volume contains.

The index for this volume (177-85) also presents some rather peculiar or misplaced entries. To name only a few: "Alvar García" is alphabetized under A; "I Corinthians 14-34" and "II Corinthians 12:9" appear under the letter I; Christine de Pizan appears under C rather than P; Constanza de Castilla appears, of course, under C, but alphabetized by Constanza; similarly, Leonor López de Córdoba appears listed under Leonor rather than López de Córdoba; there are entries for "*El Corbacho*" and "*El libro de les Dones*" under E; "Enric de Villena" occurs listed with his first name in a Catalan version; the entry for "Fernández, Yolanda Espinosa" should of course be "Espinosa Fernández, Yolanda"; likewise, "Hormaza, Juan Carrillo de" should be "Carrillo de Hormaza, Juan"; "Gómez Manrique" should be "Manrique, Gómez"; etc. Obviously the author should have done a better job, but clearly editing by the publisher is also less than acceptable.

To conclude, this is a monograph that perhaps should have been planned and conceived in a different way, less attached to certain preconceived ideas, such as

the importance of medical discourses about healing, the structuring importance of the the *ars dictaminis* and *ars sermocinandi*, and the Jewish background (153) or *converso* condition of Teresa de Cartagena. While the latter is of course true, it is not reflected in any shape or form whatsoever in her works as an element of internal identity conflict: how can we conceivably find any *angustia conversa* in a third-generation *conversa* who was grand-daughter and niece of bishops with an exemplary Christian reputation? Similarly, the analytic framework of gender studies, used in a not particularly perspicuous way, results in the repetition of a number of solipsistic formulae about phallocentrism, patriarchal discourses, castration of male power, and the like, of little or no hermeneutical or analytical value. Had she decided to break free from all these self-imposed preconceptions, I am sure that Kim's analysis would have been far more insightful, perceptive and useful, as her earlier publications on Teresa de Cartagena certainly are.

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