

**NEITHER DECEIVED, NOR DECEIVER: TERESA OF AVILA AND THE
RHETORIC OF DECEPTION IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN**

by

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*A mi mamá, mi papá y mi hermano, por ser raíz y alma de lo que soy y lo que hago.
Ya Nena, que me trajo a esta orilla*

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ABSTRACT

As a woman who claimed to experienced supernatural phenomena, such as spiritual visions and raptures, Teresa of Ávila had to face accusations of deception while confronting her own doubts of being self-deceived. Both religious authorities and visionary women in sixteenth-century Spain used the idea of deception to either dictate or challenge the dominant religious discourse. Ultimately, Teresa succeed at convincing ecclesial powers of the legitimacy of her experiences, a mandatory step for her canonization. Other visionaries were not as successful, and I analyze whether Teresa's rhetorical strategies played a role in ensuring her effective defense of the authenticity of her visions.

This analysis of Teresa of Ávila as a visionary woman who felt the need to confront the problem of deception questions the usefulness of the traditional interpretation of visionary women as either deceivers or deceived. I argue that deception has traditionally functioned as a tool of sociopolitical marginalization, and that rulers of public discourse have ignored or dismissed the voices of visionary women. This work indicates the urgency of including their stories in the larger discussion on the credibility of women's accounts of their own life experiences.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The first time I ever read Teresa of Ávila's *Book of Her Life*, many years ago, her description of spiritual visions and raptures struck me deeply. At the time, one of my family's closest friends had a near-death experience and was starting to grapple with having lost all memory of her more than fifty years of life, including those of her children and husband. Not only did she not recognize her loved ones, but she struggled with regaining physical mobility and the ability to talk. It also soon became evident that she was no longer the person we had known. Her life after almost dying began to revolve around supernatural experiences: visions, mediumship, prophecy, and raptures, very much in the style of Teresa's story. For me, it became painfully evident that neither Teresa nor my friend were allowed to talk about their experiences without having to face accusations of deception and doubts of being self-deceived. Even during the moments when I felt most generous and could contemplate the very wild possibility for any of these extraordinary accounts to be true, I could only approach these stories within the framework of deception. And I was not the only one. The questions of why and how such visions could happen at all, and whether they were true or false, or the product of mental illness or emotional distress, were always too big and important to ignore.

Despite the five centuries that separate them, and the significant differences in their respective social contexts, these visionary women have been forced to inhabit the dichotomy between supernatural experiences and legitimacy. I started to notice that my friend had to continually defend the authenticity of her spiritual experiences when questioned by scientific authorities, just like Teresa had to negotiate the authenticity of her visions with religious authorities. I have witnessed all kinds of experts who have examined my friend and tried to determine whether she is confused, sick, or outright lying. And sometimes, like Teresa, she has been required to deliver proof of her experiences. Visionary women often get trapped in the paradox of claiming to

receive supernatural gifts while being unable to provide irrefutable evidence of them. This impossibility to produce confirmation leads the rulers of the dominant social discourse, be it religious or scientific, to alternate between silencing and ignoring their stories. This is precisely why visionary women's voices need to be included in the larger discussion on how society strips away the credibility from women's accounts of their own life experiences. Deception, when directed against women who speak their own personal truth, functions as a tool of social and political marginalization.

But deception is a double-edged sword, and although institutional authorities have traditionally suspected visionary women, the general public, or at least a part of it, has often worshiped them as living saints. While many of these women are categorized as psychological patients or fraudulent tricksters, they can simultaneously become revered and influential figures. Despite having feared for many years the persecution of powerful opponents, Teresa largely succeeded at convincing many of her contemporaries of the authenticity of her spiritual visions. Some of them were important members of the nobility, or held prominent positions within ecclesial hierarchy, but many others were her close friends, nuns, and confessors. The definitive approval of her legitimacy as visionary came after her death, with her canonization in 1622, and ever since then Teresa has secured the veneration of Catholics for four hundred years. But how was she able to move from deceiver to saint? And was this transformation possible for other visionary women during Spain's sixteenth century? It is important to begin the analysis of deception in Teresa of Ávila with a brief summary of the story of her life, to understand the long and intricate process that eventually led to the official sanction of her holiness.

Teresa was born on March 28, 1515, the daughter of a family of wealthy merchants (Madre de Dios and Steggink, Introducción 1). Her paternal grandfather, Juan Sánchez, had been a

converted Jew who lived in Toledo and was reconciled to the Catholic Church in 1485. He was forced to wear the *sambenito* and march in procession around the city of Toledo while Teresa's father, Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, was five years old (Egido 132-49). After his reconciliation, Juan and his family moved to Ávila, a smaller town where he was not as scrutinized for being a new Christian. By the year 1500, he even won a legal dispute over a nobility title, which was not an uncommon practice for families of prosperous *conversos* who tried to improve their social status (Mujica 20). The family used their alleged nobility to avoid paying taxes, and to strengthen the reputation among the people of Ávila for being old Christians. Another important strategy in this respect was to marry into families of undisputed Christian blood. This is how Alonso Sánchez ended up marrying Doña Beatriz de Ahumada in 1509. It was his second marriage, after his first wife died unexpectedly and prematurely, leaving behind two children (Madre de Dios and Steggink, *Tiempo* 6-8). Both of Alonso's marriages responded to the need to seek women who pertained to *familias hidalgas*, families of the low nobility, which allowed him to further clear his Jewish ancestry and increase his wealth. Teresa's maternal heritage entitled her to be called, in all her right, Doña Teresa, at least for as long as she could keep her Jewish ancestry a secret.

When Teresa was thirteen years old, her mother died, likely from complications after the last of ten childbirths (Madre de Dios and Steggink, *Tiempo* 49). Soon after, Teresa engaged in some of the courtship rituals of the time with a cousin who she intended to marry. We do not know the extent to which this courtship came to be, but it led Teresa's father to decide to put her temporarily in a convent (*Life* 2.3-7). Conventual life proved to spark Teresa's curiosity, and years later, at the age of twenty, she ran away from home and took vows as a Carmelite nun at the convent of La Encarnación. The monastery, located just outside the city walls, housed a large population of religious women. During the almost thirty years that Teresa remained there it grew

dramatically, from around forty women to about two hundred (González 135). Many of the nuns also belonged to the nobility and maintained dynamic connections with the outer world. Over time, Teresa came to criticize what she saw as the prioritization of political and economic interests over faith and religious life. But Teresa's process of conversion to a deep spirituality was long, and took the course of several decades. During this time, Teresa also battled many illnesses, including an episode of paroxysm that lasted for four days and left her bedridden for a couple of years (*Life* 5.9). She would continue to struggle with poor health for all of her life.

While at La Encarnación, Teresa eventually engaged in the practice of deep prayer, and by the age of forty, she started to experience supernatural phenomena, such as visions and raptures. She consulted her experiences with her confessors, and she particularly sought the advice of prestigious theologians on the matter. At the beginning, she was not believed and was accused of being deceived by the devil (*Life* 23.13-16). But in time, and through a series of strategic claims, Teresa gained the trust of many of her confessors, who ended up being her confidants and even her disciples on her practice of prayer (Weber, *Rhetoric* 43). Her spiritual visions also served as motivation and justification for the development of what came to be an impressive religious reform. In 1562, Teresa founded a reformed Carmelite convent called San José, right outside the walls of Ávila. Her idea was to lead, with a small number of devoted nuns, a more austere life, centered on prayer and contemplation, in strict enclosure and with a more rigid enforcement of poverty and obedience. In a way, Teresa was responding to the heavily politicized atmosphere that she had seen at La Encarnación.

San José became the first Discalced Carmelite convent, and soon received the visit of the Principal of the Carmelite Order, Father Giovanni Battista Rossi, known in Spain as Rubeo. Rubeo was so impressed with what Teresa had done that he soon gave his permission for her to continue

founding similar convents throughout Spain (Steggink 284-89). Eventually, this became a large enterprise that took Teresa all across the Spanish territories, founding a total of seventeen Discalced or reformed convents for both monks and nuns. The reform came at a high price for her, as she suffered the ruthless opposition of the unreformed or relaxed branch of the Carmelites. During the tensest moments of this conflict, Teresa was threatened to be excommunicated, was ordered to remain secluded in one of her convents and to refrain from further foundations, and several of her Discalced friends, including Friar John of the Cross, were incarcerated. But Teresa managed to successfully navigate this hostility, in large part thanks to her powerful connections and to her own resourcefulness.

Moreover, Teresa secured the support from key allies within the clergy and the aristocracy. The letters she wrote during these grueling times are a testimony of her political genius, including, for example, the letters she sent to King Philip II asking for his support for her reform and protesting the unfair persecution of the relaxed Carmelites. It is no coincidence that the years of intense foundational activity were also a time of prolific writing. Teresa wrote over four hundred letters, and she authored a significant body of written works in which she described her spiritual experiences, taught her method of prayer to the nuns in her Discalced convents, and explained her reforming project. Some of her adversaries used her writings, and specifically her description of visions, to try to prove that she was a deceiver, a weak woman with a feverish imagination, or a victim of the devil's deceit. Felipe Segá, the Papal Nuncio, described her as a "restless, wandering, disobedient, and stubborn woman" (Fernández Collado 345).¹ Segá and other theologians

¹ "Una f  mina inquieta, andariega, desobediente y contumaz que a t  tulo de devoci  n inventaba malas doctrinas, andando fuera de la clausura contra el orden del Concilio Tridentino y prelados, ense  ando como maestra contra lo que San Pablo ense    mandando que las mujeres no ense  asen."

criticized her pretentiousness for trying to teach “bad doctrines” to learned men. Deception always remained at the core of opposition against Teresa, her visionary activity, and her religious reform.

The Inquisition also received denunciations against Teresa at various times, although these accusations never mounted to an official trial. A large number of these charges orbit around the idea of deception, and they speak directly to the prejudices that church officials had against women and unsanctioned forms of religious experience. As part of the Church’s efforts to regain control of orthodoxy, shaken by the Protestant Reform and the spread of important heretical groups, ecclesial authorities started to censor and repudiate visionary women. But despite all of these obstacles, Teresa died of old age, peacefully lying on her death bed, and, in her own words, “a daughter of the Church” (Madre de Dios and Steggink, *Tiempo* 935). Her beatification and canonization proceedings began remarkably soon, and are record-breaking in both length and thoroughness. Her rapid canonization, only forty years after her death, was an extraordinary achievement, by all standards. None of her famous contemporaries—Peter of Alcántara, John of Ávila, Francis Borgia, or John of the Cross—had such a spectacular ascension to the altars, perhaps with the exception of Ignatius of Loyola, who was canonized on the same day as Teresa, but who had died almost thirty years before she did.

One of the most obvious reasons for Teresa’s success was her use of rhetorical strategies. In 1990, Alison Weber published *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, a study on Teresa’s masterful use of rhetorical devices. Weber identified, among other things, the Carmelite’s half-hearted adoption of misogynistic tropes, her calculated assertions of humility, and her declaration of an obedience that, upon close scrutiny, was more convenient than it was unambiguous. Weber’s work had a profound impact on Teresian studies, as traditional interpretations of Teresa’s style had characterized it as either vulgar, feminine, spontaneous, or

sincere (Weber, *Rhetoric* 5-15). Up until that point, most critics had failed to acknowledge the strategic nature of many of the claims made by Teresa, and took at face value what could demonstrably be classified as rhetorical tropes. Other scholars also contributed to our understanding of important variables in Teresa's complicated path to sainthood. Jodi Bilinkoff wrote *The Avila of Saint Teresa* (1989), a study on Ávila's long history of religious reform, and how it paved the way for Teresa's foundational enterprise. Gillian Ahlgren published *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (1996), in which she extensively analyzed the politics behind Teresa's canonization, and especially the transformation of her image so that it would fit the Counter-Reformation agenda. The scholarly work of these three authors both revolutionized the traditional approach to Teresa and her written work, and provided a platform from which to raise new questions.

My research on the problem of deception in Teresa builds on Weber's analysis of rhetorical strategies. I have found in the writings of Teresa a series of strategic claims designed to confront accusations of being a deceiver or doubts of being self-deceived. These claims, which I have called Teresa's rhetoric of deception, borrow the language of ecclesial authorities, use the idea of self-deception as a source of legitimacy for her spiritual visions, and ultimately redefine the concept of deception. Teresa continually portrayed herself as a doubtful, unlearned woman, always in need and willing to submit to the authority of theologians. The rhetoric of deception is so prevalent in Teresa's work that it is a good indicator of how she continually worried about accusations against her, and how suspicions directed at her had the potential to compromise the integrity of her reforming project. In my research, deception emerged as a category of disputed power, used at the same time by those who accused visionary women, and by visionary women themselves.

Deception was not merely a tool for the control of religious discourse, but paradoxically, it was also a rhetorical strategy employed by those who, like Teresa, attempted to challenge such control.

I have dedicated Chapter One to the explanation of the complex sociopolitical forces at work during Teresa's time, and particularly to the examination of her rhetoric of deception as part of a larger discussion on the limits of orthodoxy. Amidst an outstandingly unfavorable climate for women's reports of supernatural phenomena, Teresa defended the authenticity of her religious experience. Her defense benefited from the evident cracks that appeared on the surface of Spain's sixteenth-century religious discourse. Far from being monolithic, religious authorities kept feeding debates and creating factions within the Church. In this chapter, I argue that Teresa's rhetoric of deception contributed to relieve her from some of the suspicions, prevalently misogynistic, of confessors and theologians who assessed her visionary activity. But her rhetoric of deception was an endeavor that required a delicate balance: it had to simultaneously spare the legitimacy of her own visionary activity, and keep at bay the unwanted attention of church officials in order to protect her reform. In a way, Teresa had to both embrace and challenge the discourse of deception from religious authorities.

Chapter Two is a close reading of Teresa's writings with the purpose of identifying her rhetoric of deception. As Teresa contemplated many times the possibility of being deceived, either by the devil, by her imagination, or by others, she simultaneously had to react to accusations of being a deceiver. To face this problem, Teresa made use of different rhetorical strategies, which have been brought to our attention by the influential work of Alison Weber. But Weber's study raised the question of Teresa's sincerity: if Teresa responded to accusations of heresy and to her own insecurities of being deceived by devising complex rhetorical strategies, how much of her message is truly sincere? Were her exclamations of fear of being deceived just a façade to protect

herself from the suspicions of religious authorities? Or did Teresa really fear the possibility of being tricked by the devil? (*Rhetoric* 5). I explore these questions by analyzing Teresa's fluid redefinition of deception, and how it led her to reconsider other concepts such as theological knowledge, doubt, humility, and obedience. I argue that the question of Teresa's sincerity might not be one of either/or, since the evidence found in her texts is ambiguous at best, and often contradictory.

Chapter Three is an analysis of the official accusations presented to the Inquisition against Teresa, years after her death. I specifically review the accusations of theologians Alonso de la Fuente, Juan de Lorenzana, Juan de Orellana, and Francisco de Pisa. For the accusers, several of Teresa's propositions on spirituality and her accounts of visions and raptures posed the threat of deception. These men worried that her books could lead other believers, and particularly women, to being victims of the devil's tricks. The idea of deception was so central in their letters to the Inquisition, that it became the basis for their justification to request the banning of Teresa's written works. But no matter how clear their position was regarding her books, their opinions became increasingly ambiguous when it came to Teresa as a person. Her reputation for holiness put the accusers in a position of growing unpopularity. While accusers understood Teresa's visions to be either the product of women's feeble imagination, physical weakness, or the work of the devil, Teresa's work as foundress, the rumors about the incorruptibility of her body, the many miracles attributed to her, and the support of her influential allies, were strong elements that weakened the idea of Teresa as deceiver.

Finally, Chapter Four is a comparison between Teresa's case and that of her contemporary, Francisca de los Apóstoles. Francisca was another visionary woman who, like Teresa, tried to initiate a religious reform, but her project was cut short with the intervention of the Inquisition.

Unlike Teresa, Francisca was trialed for her visions, was deemed an *ilusa*, a self-deceived woman, and was sentenced to flogging and exile from her hometown. The comparison between the rhetorical strategies of Francisca and Teresa illuminates the causes for their respective failure and success in the defense of the legitimacy of their visions. It also suggests that rhetorical strategies were not exclusive to Teresa, but rather a resource known and used by other religious women. As visionaries, Teresa and Francisca stepped into a role that led them to confront the power of religious authorities, and accusations of deception became an obvious instrument that allowed ecclesial power to defend their monopoly of religious truth. Teresa's canonization and Francisca's condemnation reveal that the fates of visionary women were the product of a complex combination of variables, including the visionaries' access to resources, their timing, and even their geographical location. Despite all their similarities—from their efforts to advance religious reform, to their use of almost identical rhetorical strategies—Francisca and Teresa ended up having very different fates, which speak not solely to their individual capacity to challenge the discourse of religious authorities, but also to their own specific circumstances.

Teresa of Ávila's deliberate use of a rhetoric of deception indicates her awareness of the conflicts that her spiritual visions generated, particularly in the face of inquisitorial control. Her rhetorical strategies are complex networks of nuanced, and at times, contradicting concepts, devised to negotiate the legitimization of her visions and her orthodoxy with religious authorities. In this process of negotiation, deception clearly emerged as a category of contested power between visionary women and ecclesial power. Ideas on gender also proved to shape the discussion around the legitimacy of spiritual visions in women, and raised questions regarding the role of theologians and confessors in subjecting to the charismatic authority of their female visionary penitents. I have structured this analysis so that it is possible to weave together a larger picture that includes Teresa's

historical context and the religious landscape of Spain's sixteenth century, and Teresa's own rhetoric of deception, particularly when contrasted with accusations of deception presented against her and with the rhetorical strategies of an unsuccessful visionary woman. It is my goal that this reflection on the function of deception in Teresa of Ávila contributes to a better understanding of early modern visionary women.

This research is also an attempt to question the traditional academic treatment of visionary women's voices. Controllers of the dominant social discourse, be it religious or scientific, typically meet accounts of supernatural phenomena, particularly those of women, with resistance. Paradoxically, the general public often welcomes these extraordinary narratives as proof of their own religious or spiritual convictions. The clash of these conflicting attitudes results in accounts of visionary women being approached solely from the framework of deception. But, as I have argued throughout this work, deception is an instrument of power, used to simultaneously control and challenge the dominant social discourse. As such, it is necessary that we question the suitability of deception as an appropriate framework to assess stories of supernatural experiences. It became obvious, during the course of this research, that scholars rarely regard claims of visionary women as expressions of plausible human experiences, and predictably meet them with suspicion. I would like to suggest that, in stepping away from the framework of deception, we might be able to create a space for a more generous interpretation of the stories of visionary women. In doing so, we might also examine the instinctive response to silence or dismiss these voices, and rather, meet them as yet another expression of the complexities and nuances of the human mind and experience.

CHAPTER 2. TERESA'S PLACE IN THE RHETORIC OF DECEPTION OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

Christianity has traditionally defined the devil as deceiver. We find him disguised as a serpent in the Genesis, eager to spread his deceit unto humankind. From then on, the Bible repeatedly refers to him as the father of falsehood and lies.² Christ, in contrast, stands as truth.³ The idea of the devil as deceiver is fully developed in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, where he lures Eve with the possibility of attaining godlike knowledge. Eve not only falls into the serpent's trap, but she also offers Adam the forbidden fruit, thus dragging him down the path of sin. This biblical episode has had a significant resonance in the development of the Christian world, and it had a powerful influence in shaping Teresa of Avila's time. The story of the original sin, for early modern Europeans, formed part of a larger gender narrative that was especially unforgiving of women. Eve's acquiescence to the serpent became a symbol of female seduction, and it associated women with deception and with a gateway to sin and evil.⁴

Religious authorities in early modern Spain generally embraced the idea of an inherent connection between womanhood and deception, and more specifically, between women and the devil.⁵ Several spiritual treatises, theological studies, and didactic literary works demonstrate the prevalent belief in the existence of this connection.⁶ Moreover, Paul's dictum of silence ensured

² See, for instance, Genesis 3; John 8:44; 2 Cor 11; Rev 12:9; and 1 Tim 2:11-15. All biblical references are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

³ "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." See John 14:6.

⁴ Jo Ann McNamara summarizes the medieval and early modern Christian ideas about female religious discourse and Eve's heritage of sin in "The Rhetoric of Orthodoxy." See especially pages 9-10. For an exceptionally succinct and clarifying review of women's roles as determined by history, culture, and religion, see the introduction written by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. for "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe" series, of which Gillian Ahlgren's *The Inquisition of Francisca* is part.

⁵ In his work *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism*, Moshe Sluhovskiy captures this idea in a powerful way: "Women were perceived as more prone than men to be possessed by demons, more likely to be deceived by them, and more likely to pursue sexual gratification with them." (143).

⁶ For an analysis of the *querella de las mujeres*, see Emily C. Francomano's "'The Early Modern Foundations of the Querella de las Mujeres.'" Works that develop the idea of this inherent connection between women and evil from the

that women's voices would not be heard on religious matters, so as to prevent the sacred realm from being tarnished by either the frailty or the wickedness of the female nature.⁷ Sixteenth-century Spanish theologians heavily relied on Paul's instruction to promote a culture of silence and submission among religious women, and particularly to maintain control over visionaries. Often, women who claimed to experience supernatural gifts would be accused of being deceivers or of being deceived by the devil.⁸ In fact, official accusatory documents presented to the Inquisition against visionary women are an invaluable testament of how church officials perceived them as political and moral threats to the social order. This is not to say that visionary men were exempted from charges of deception. However, cultural conventions turned women into the primary targets of suspicions of deceit, far more often than men.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that spiritual visions filled Teresa of Avila's life with risk and uncertainty. These visions implied supernatural experiences that included the hearing of interior voices, visions of God, the Virgin or the saints, prophetic ability, and at times, episodes of raptures and levitation. Like many other visionary women of her time, Teresa was accused of deception.⁹ Some of her confessors, as well as renowned theologians who read her works worried that her visions were either the product of her imagination or tricks by the devil. And yet, despite the adverse historical conditions that played against her, Teresa managed to succeed. Not only was

late fifteenth century are Martín de Córdoba's *Jardín de nobles doncellas*; and *El Corbacho* by Alfonso Martínez de Toledo. Sixteenth century examples are Luis de León's *La perfecta casada*; and Martín de Castañega's *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechicerías*. French theologian Jean Gerson influenced Spanish theologians in his treatment of the discernment of spirits, particularly regarding this idea of women as deceivers. His tract *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations* is frequently quoted by Teresa's accusers. I will discuss Gerson in the following pages.

⁷ See 1 Cor, 14:34-5 "Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law saith. But if they would learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church."

⁸ Jodi Bilinkoff has emphasized important friendships and collaborations between some religious women and their confessors and biographers, thus bringing nuance to the understanding of general female submission to male clerics. However, Bilinkoff also calls the debate around the legitimacy of visions experienced by women "the classic theological dilemma of the period." See *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450-1750*, p. 41.

⁹ For more on early modern religious women in Spain and their difficult relation with the Catholic Church, see Mary E. Giles' *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*.

she able to carry out an impressive reforming project, but she also gained the institutional recognition of her sanctity. Teresa's canonization in 1622 put to an end the discussion around the legitimacy of her mystical experiences, and undoubtedly, numerous variables contributed to this resounding triumph. In her writings, Teresa redefined the concept of deception by using a series of strategic devices which I call her rhetoric of deception. Throughout this work I argue that her careful redefinition of deception became a key element in the construction of Teresa's reputation of holiness. Her use of a rhetoric of deception challenged the prejudices that religious authorities had against visionary women, and it contributed to turning Teresa, a visionary woman, into the first female Doctor of the Church.

Having started her reform in large part because of several visions in which God asked her to undertake such a project, Teresa found herself in the paradoxical situation of finding that the visionary activity reported by some of the nuns in her convents started to become a threat to the reform itself. While at the beginning of her visionary experiences Teresa complained about having to navigate suspicions from ruthless confessors, years later, she became increasingly mistrustful of the visions and raptures reported by some of her nuns. In her more mature work, *The Book of Foundations* (1580), Teresa created a guide for the prioresses of her convents, so that they would know how to better handle cases of supernatural activity.¹⁰ Although she did not explicitly put it in writing, it is possible that Teresa feared that circulating rumors of such cases could attract the attention of religious authorities, namely the Inquisition. Given the tense atmosphere that surrounded her reform, facing opposition from the Carmelite Order, local elites, and religious

¹⁰ See especially chapters 4-8. All references to Teresa's works are taken from the complete works, *Obras completas*, edited by Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink. I cite Teresa's books as follows: *Life*, for *The Book of Her Life* (1562); *Way*, for *The Way of Perfection* (1566); *Castle*, for *The Interior Castle* (1577); and *Foundations*, for *The Book of Foundations* (1580). The work's name will be followed by chapter and paragraph. I have considered the page number irrelevant, given the numerous editions of Teresa's works and the great variation in paging from one edition to another. For the sake of clarity, I have also updated old forms of spelling that do not alter meaning.

officials, Teresa might have suspected that an inquisitorial intervention in her convents could have meant the end of the entire reform.

Teresa's visions prompted allegations that she was either deceived by the devil or a malicious deceiver. Understanding the connection between womanhood and deception, and more specifically, between women and the devil is the first step to unraveling Teresa's visionary activity. In this chapter, I analyze the association of spiritual visions and the idea of deception, as it can only be understood as part of a larger historical context, marked by numerous and complicated religious debates during Spain's Counterreformation. Theologians at the time were trying to determine the limits of orthodoxy, and to define fundamental issues such as mental prayer, heresy, gender roles, and unsanctioned forms of spirituality. The process also entailed the classification of what would be considered as legitimate or illegitimate religious experiences, particularly as different spiritual practices and heretical groups were beginning to spread. As we shall see, visionary women were subjected to a crucial resource used by the Church to assess the authenticity of accounts of supernatural gifts: the discernment of spirits. In her writings, Teresa not only challenged the discourse on the discernment of spirits, but she even reshaped it. In a way, her rhetoric of deception was a conscious response to the complex religious environment of her time, but it was also a fierce defense of her reforming enterprise.

Spiritual Visions Turned into Religious Reform

Teresa of Avila was a controversial figure during her lifetime and continued to be so for many years after her death. In her autobiography, *The Book of Her Life* (1562), she reported that her visionary activity began rather late, when she was about forty years of age. Once the rumors of her visions started to circulate publicly, she gained the attention of ecclesial authorities and was suspected of deception. Accusations against her eventually found their way to the Inquisition

tribunals.¹¹ Two of her confessors, Pedro Ibáñez and Domingo Báñez, both Dominicans, wrote official documents defending the legitimacy of her visions and her submission to the Church. These written statements indicate the responsibility felt from Teresa's confessors to defend her visions.¹² Teresa herself also wrote a general confession, in all likelihood required by inquisitors.¹³ Her own defense and that from her confessors signal that her visions raised suspicions from the arbiters of orthodoxy of her time. But this was as far as her encounters with the Inquisition went, and to the best of our knowledge, she was never held for interrogation and her case never received definitive sentencing.

The questions as to why or how Teresa was able to avoid a trial by the Inquisition still puzzle Teresianist scholars today. Her successful transition from a suspected visionary to a saint (later Doctor of the Church) is the result of a complex process which is not fully comprehended thus far. However, some scholarly work offers partial explanations for the official acceptance of the legitimacy of Teresa's visions. For instance, in his work *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la inquisición española*, scholar Enrique Llamas Martínez suggested the powerful effect of the Carmelite's personality on her critics. Although it is extremely hard to gather evidence of the sort of influence that Teresa's character might have exerted on those who got to know her personally, it is clear that she was able to change the minds of some of her initial detractors after meeting with them. Llamas

¹¹ For Teresa's dealings with the Inquisition, see Enrique Llamas Martínez, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la inquisición española*.

¹² Pedro Ibáñez wrote his defense of Teresa around 1560, and it is known as his *dictamen*, or dictum. Around 1564 he wrote a second report on the legitimacy of Teresa's spiritual experiences, which Llamas attributed, probably in error, to Domingo Báñez, another Dominican who was also Teresa's confessor. Báñez wrote his censure of Teresa's *Book of Her Life* in 1575, according to Silverio de Santa Teresa, after the book was denounced to the Inquisition. All of these documents are found in full in Silverio de Santa Teresa's edition to Teresa's *Obras completas*, by the Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana, pp. 130-32, 133-52, and 211-13.

¹³ Not much has been said about this strange document written by Teresa, probably around 1576. The text was written in the third person; a clear indication of its legal basis. Llamas was the first to analyze its structure, and to conclude it must have been demanded by inquisitors or *calificadores* that were investigating Teresa's case. Interestingly, the document appears, unexplained, as number 57 of the "Cuentas de conciencia" in the *Complete works* edited by Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink. This editorial decision might reflect their unwillingness to examine the document, perhaps for fear of unraveling Teresa's clashes with church officials.

mentions specifically the cases of Inquisitor General Gaspar de Quiroga (XII), theologian Bartolomé de Medina (18), and the Jesuit Rodrigo Álvarez (110), who went from critics to supporters of Teresa. Remarkably, it is also true that some theologians who had personally met Teresa and had a good opinion of her, later changed their minds and accused her to the Inquisition after reading her written work. As Llamas himself wrote, this was the case with Dominicans Juan de Orellana (352-4) and Juan de Lorenzana (363-7).

Other scholars have identified Teresa's impressive network of allies and powerful figures, which included, among others: Inquisitor General Gaspar de Quiroga; notable members of the nobility, such as doña Luisa de la Cerda (daughter of the second duke of Medinaceli), doña María Sarmiento de Mendoza (sister of Álvaro de Mendoza, bishop of Ávila), and doña Ana de Mendoza (princess of Eboli); and even King Philip II (1556-98).¹⁴ Scholar Carole Slade has convincingly argued, against what has become a widely accepted—although unsupported—tradition, the unlikelihood of a personal relation between Teresa and King Philip II. However, Slade acknowledges the strong support Philip gave to Teresa posthumously. Slade also mentions Roque de la Huerta, a royal secretary, and the Count of Tendilla, a member of the King's Council of State. Both of these men interceded to the king on Teresa's behalf, likely because Tendilla had a niece who entered one of Teresa's reformed convents, and because Huerta's own daughter professed at Teresa's convent in Soria. There is evidence of at least 15 letters sent by Teresa to Roque de la Huerta.¹⁵

¹⁴ Gaspar de Quiroga y Vela (Inquisitor General from 1573-94) and inquisitor Francisco Soto y Salazar (d. 1578) were Teresa's friends and supporters from inside the Inquisition. See Llamas, especially pages 45-6, 92, and 127. Some of Teresa's crucial allies among the aristocracy were doña Luisa de la Cerda, doña Teresa de Laíz, and doña Ana de Mendoza, Princess of Eboli. Teresa also exchanged letters with doña María Enríquez de Toledo, duchess of Alba. See Weber's "Saint Teresa's Problematic Patrons," and Teófanés Egido's "Ambiente histórico."

¹⁵ See Carol Slade's article "The Relationship between Teresa of Avila and Philip II," especially page 241. For the development of a cult of Teresa within the royal family, see Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Saint and Nation*, especially chapter 3.

The general atmosphere of religious reform in Spain, and particularly in Avila, as historian Jodi Bilinkoff has shown, also favored Teresa's own reforming enterprise.¹⁶ Religious Studies scholar Gillian Ahlgren proved how Church authorities altered Teresa's image and later accommodated her theology of mysticism to fit the Counter Reformation agenda.¹⁷ Naturally, gender considerations have been at the core of Teresian scholarship for many years. Alison Weber's study of the rhetorical strategies used by Teresa in her writings revealed the mystic's calculated adoption of misogynistic and subservient ideas associated with women; this, she argues, helped Teresa gain the trust of her confessors and superiors and elude inquisitorial control.¹⁸ Weber has also highlighted the critical value of Teresa's collaboration with male religious figures, including several confessors, theologians, and men with reputation for holiness. Among the latter are influential religious leaders such as John of Ávila and Peter of Alcántara.¹⁹

The contributions mentioned here, along with the work of many others, reveal important elements that took Teresa from being a suspected visionary to a saint, and later to Doctor of the Church. At the core of Teresian scholarship continues to lie the question of how Teresa was able to circumvent the initial suspicion of religious authorities and gain enough support for her later beatification. An inquisitorial trial would have been devastating, although it is unlikely that she would have ended at the stake as has been traditionally affirmed. Visionary women put on trial by the Inquisition received strong punishment, along with social and moral sanctions that led to seclusion, poverty, and isolation. Such was the case of Teresa's contemporary, Francisca de los Apóstoles, a visionary woman whose case is examined in chapter 4. Most importantly, the ordeal

¹⁶ See Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*.

¹⁷ See Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*.

¹⁸ See Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*.

¹⁹ See Weber, "Autoridad carismática, rutinización y las fronteras de género en el Carmelo Descalzo," especially pages 245-249.

would have shattered her reforming project, and it had the potential to uncover her *converso* family background. It is astonishing that not until 1946, thanks to the archival work of Narciso Alonso Cortés, her Jewish roots came to light. Teresa's paternal grandfather, Juan Sánchez de Toledo, was a Jewish *converso* who was reconciled to the Catholic Church in 1485. He was forced to wear the *sambenito* and march in procession around the city of Toledo for seven consecutive Fridays. Teresa's father, Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, was five at the time.²⁰

Undoubtedly, Teresa's visions came with an enormous risk, and yet, she did not take great pains to hide them. In many of her writings, Teresa described in great detail her visions, and she attributed to them the motivation to become a religious reformer. As she wrote in chapter 32 of *The Book of Her Life*, God had inspired her during a vision to found a convent where she and a handful of very committed nuns would live under the primitive Carmelite rule.²¹ This primitive rule referred to a more severe regulation of everyday life for Carmelite nuns and friars, which had been mitigated in 1432 by Pope Eugene IV. This change relaxed stipulations that had to do with abstinence from meat and freedom to move (Payne xxvi-xvii). Teresa set out to found a convent that would be subjected to the primitive and more rigorous rule, and which encouraged the adoption of stricter forms of enclosure and renouncement of worldly possessions (Bilinkoff, *The Avila* 114).

Teresa's plan had the potential to generate important social and political consequences. Convents in sixteenth-century Spain had become places where local aristocratic families could exert power by using them as strategic emplacements for their widows or unmarried daughters.

²⁰ It took scholars four hundred years to find irrefutable proof of Teresa's Jewish ancestry, and there is much speculation as to the role of the Catholic Church and secular authorities in hiding Teresa's Jewish past. It is also still uncertain how much Teresa knew about her family's history. For Teresa's Jewish ancestry and its scholarly treatment, see Teófanés Egidio, "The Historical Setting of St. Teresa's Life," especially pages 132-49. For Alonso Cortés' original publication see "Pleitos de los Cepedas."

²¹ For the historical context and the socioeconomic implications of Teresa's reforming project, see Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*. For a history of the Carmelites, see Steven Payne's *The Carmelite Tradition*.

Teresa had come to criticize what she considered was a prioritization of political over spiritual affairs at her convent of La Encarnación. This is why in 1562 she founded a reformed monastery, San José of Ávila, where a small group of nuns would live under strict poverty, chastity, and obedience. In her *Book of Foundations*, Teresa recalled how the Father General of the Carmelites, Giovanni Battista Rossi, known in Spain as Rubeo, visited the Carmelite communities in Spain in 1566 (2.1-6). According to her account, Rubeo was so impressed with what Teresa had done that he gave her license to found more convents like that of San José. However, Teresa's quick attribution of the idea to found new reformed convents to Rubeo should be taken with a grain of salt. Right before she mentioned the General's visit, she had described a vision in which God promised her she would see great things (*Foundations* 1.8). The vision suggests that her deference to Rubeo as intellectual author of her reform could be merely a rhetorical strategy to emphasize her obedience. Whatever the case, what started as a desire for a more secluded life became a remarkable enterprise that transformed the Carmelite order. In the following two decades, Teresa achieved the foundation of seventeen Discalced Carmelite convents for both nuns and friars all across Spain.

However, this reforming project gave way to numerous problems, particularly with the relaxed Carmelites. In the process of founding San José, Teresa requested the order's provincial, Father Ángel Salazar, to accept the new convent as part of his jurisdiction, but Salazar refused (Steggink 237-42). By the time of Rubeo's visit, San José was under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Ávila, don Álvaro de Mendoza. Teresa's reform started to be regarded as the loss of the power and unity of the Carmelite order. Tensions between the reformed and unreformed Carmelites eventually escalated. At the Carmelites' general chapter in Piacenza in 1576, it was decided that

no more foundations would be allowed.²² Rubeo, who had initially supported Teresa with enthusiasm, forbade her from founding new convents and ordered her seclusion in one of her monasteries under threat of excommunication. To make matters worse, the nuns at La Encarnación, some of whom had opposed Teresa at the beginning, elected her as their prioress. Relaxed Carmelites suspected that the confessors at La Encarnación, Discalced friars John of the Cross and Germán de San Matías were behind the nuns' election. As a result, the two confessors were imprisoned and the fifty-five nuns were excommunicated (Mujica 42-3).²³

The unreformed Carmelites made attempts to put under their control the Discalced houses, particularly those of friars, and their efforts almost succeeded. Teresa's entire reform project, the work of fifteen years, in her words "came close to an end" (*Foundations* 28.1).²⁴ The Papal Nuncio who had favored the reform, Nicolás Ormaneto, had died in 1577, and the man who came to take his place, Felipe Segá, radically opposed the Discalced reform. He also considered Teresa as a "restless, wandering, disobedient, and stubborn woman" who dared to teach doctrine despite Paul's dictum of silence (Fernández Collado 345).²⁵ In the end, only the intervention of Pope Gregory XIII in 1580 and that of King Philip II in 1581 ensured the definitive independence of the Discalced from the relaxed Carmelites, and thus saved Teresa's reform (Madre de Dios and Steggink 732-3).

The powerful opposition to Teresa's reforming endeavor would have been enough to discourage anyone in her place. She faced the opposition of many of her superiors, the incarceration and persecution of her closest friends, the excommunication of allies, and the fear of

²² For a thorough account of the consequences of the Discalced reform, see Otger Steggink's *La reforma del Carmelo español*.

²³ For Teresa's account of the excommunication of the nuns at La Encarnación, see her letter to María de San José, prioress of the reformed convent in Seville, dated on October 22, 1577. For an account of Teresa's reform from the perspective of gender and authority, see Alison Weber, "Autoridad carismática," especially page 249.

²⁴ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. "Estuvo a punto de acabarse todo."

²⁵ "Una fémmina inquieta, andariega, desobediente y contumaz, que a título de devoción inventaba malas doctrinas, andando fuera de la clausura contra el orden del concilio tridentino y prelados, enseñando como maestra contra lo que San Pablo enseñó mandando que las mujeres no enseñasen."

a potential inquisitorial trial. And despite this hostility, Teresa met all hardships with the conviction that her visions were a reassurance, to herself as much as to some of her confessors, nuns, and collaborators, that her reform was the expression of divine will. It was precisely this conviction that kept her going. There are numerous examples of specific fragments in her writings where Teresa establishes a clear connection between her visions and her religious reform. For instance, in *Life* 32.11 Teresa claims God told her to found the first Discalced convent of San José, and in 36.24 she describes how Christ crowned her in gratitude after she completed this challenging project. In *The Book of Foundations* there are plenty of examples of visions as the origin of various reformed convents. In chapter 20, remarkably, Teresa tells the story of Teresa de Laíz, whose visions led to the founding of the reformed convent in Alba de Tormes (1-15). Teresa's visions, and sometimes those of others, justified the launch of the reforming enterprise, and for its continuous defense, even in the face of great danger.

Women and Visions: What Did She See?

Scholar Mónica Balltondre has studied the nature of Teresa's visions, and she argues that most of them had to do either with her reforming project or with her own spiritual development (100). According to Teresa's account in *The Book of Her Life*, these visions included sights of Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, angels, certain saints, sights of both heaven and hell (and, importantly, people who were in them), scenes from the Passion, and other Catholic imagery. She also claimed to have seen the souls of friends or acquaintances who had died, and often too had premonitions of things that were to happen. But whatever the case, Teresa's visions seem to play a central role in defending her own legitimacy as visionary and that of her reforming project. Scholars, as much as her accusers at the time, have noted the great emphasis that Teresa placed on

the experiential nature of her religious life, namely her visions and raptures.²⁶ If it is true that accusers relied on her visions to charge her at the Inquisition tribunals, it is also true that Teresa herself put those visions at the center of her life and writings. There would be no Teresa without the visions.

Teresa consistently described supernatural experiences as the result of God's agency, entirely independent from the believer's actions. The visions were a gift that could only be the result of God's grace, and was not correlated with the merits of the receiver. Teresa also insisted on the idea that visions were by no means necessary to achieve union with God or to experience spiritual growth. But despite all of this, she failed to explain her own spiritual progress without referring, again and again, to the numerous supernatural gifts she received. This insistence on the experiential nature of Teresa's spirituality, Denise DuPont has argued, cannot be explained without attending to gender (17). Being a woman entailed the lack of access to formal theological knowledge, and therefore experience became a natural path to women who wanted to develop their sense of spirituality. And prayer constituted a large part of this religious experience. Gillian Ahlgren has stated to this respect that "even prayer, the only real way for women to gain theological credibility within Catholic institutions, was held up close for scrutiny" ("Negotiating Sanctity" 375-6). To deny the centrality of Teresa's experiences—and that of other visionary women—would mean, in DuPont's words, "to masculinize or neuter" her story (17).

But the talk about visions inevitably led to the debate of deception. Confessors and theologians tried to explain Teresa's visions from the framework of whether or not they were real, and whether or not she was lying. I have dedicated chapter 3 to the analysis of official accusations against Teresa presented to the Inquisition, but it is crucial to state here that, for her accusers, her

²⁶ See Jesús Castellano, "Espiritualidad teresiana;" Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*; and Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila*. All of them are commented and cited by Denise DuPont, "Teresa's Experiences."

condition of visionary became a strong argument in support of the idea that she was either deceived by the devil or a deceiver herself. An important part of the criticism directed at Teresa, during her lifetime and even for years after her death, revolved around the possibility that she had been a fraudulent trickster, a nun whose visions were nothing but an attempt to gain fame. And Teresa, as much as her defenders, had to develop strategies to confront accusations of being a deceiver or of being deceived. In the next pages, I will address the very idea of religious deception during Teresa's time, and how it evolved to become a category of disputed power between self-identified visionaries and ecclesial authorities.

Visionary Women and Religious Deception in the Sixteenth Century

The concept of religious deception in sixteenth-century Spain evolved as part of a larger debate in which ecclesial authorities were still defining the limits of orthodoxy. As the century unfolded, the concept of deception became more and more useful to control religious discourse, and it also became more evidently gendered. In the early 1500s, visionary women and their supernatural experiences were seen with benevolence. By the end of the century, the threat to Catholicism posed by the advance of the Protestant reformation, the proliferation of heretics within Spain (mainly *alumbrados*), and renowned cases of fraudulent visionary women contributed to the creation of more rigid limits to existing forms of religiosity. The legitimacy of religious practices and beliefs that did not conform to strict parameters dictated by the clerical institution was put under siege. Factions within the Catholic Church emerged to both challenge and reclaim a stricter control of religious discourse. It is amidst this heated theological debate that the concept of religious deception was forged.

To understand religious deception, it is crucial to first examine what the concept of deception meant for sixteenth century Spaniards. The *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*,

authored by Covarrubias and a touchstone for discussing early modern vocabulary was first published in 1611. It offers the following definition for the term *engaño*:

Lat. *fraus, dolus*, it is said [to come] from the word *ganeum*, which means taproom, or secret tavern, where cat is sold as hare, and where the visitors that go there to eat are made to pay a high scot; and no more and no less the small houses and basements of whores who also deceive the visitors, by making them think that they are honest women . . . the one who has greed for something is easily deceived, and gives for a thing more than it is worth; and the one who deceives shows willingness and desire for a thing, and does something else . . . the one deceived is always at a loss; and according to Carolo Bouilio, it is a French word, *engigniet, id est, fallere ab ingenio*; because the deceiver is clever and astute. To be deceived, to not be certain about the truth. Deceiver, the trickster. (352)²⁷

The general definition of deception has not varied much in the last four hundred years; i.e., still today we understand deception as the act of lying about something or of hiding the true meaning of something. But it is noteworthy that the author of the first dictionary of the Spanish language referred to prostitutes as deceivers in his description of the meaning of deception. It is hard not to see this reference, which comes in the first lines of the definition, as yet another expression of a prevalent notion that characterized women as deceivers. Covarrubias also assigned value to deception by declaring that, while the deceiver is clever (*ingenioso*) or a trickster (*burlador*), the deceived person is always at a loss. Perhaps because deception often involved economic or psychological losses, it was often considered a crime, and there were legal implications and even punishments for deceivers. Deception is mentioned over 46 times in the thirteen-century legal code attributed to King Alfonso X, *Siete partidas*. It is also important to note

²⁷ “Lat. *fraus, dolus*, dixose de la palabra *ganeum*, que vale el bodegón, o taberna secreta, donde se vende el gato por liebre, y hacen pagar muy bien el escote a los forasteros que van allí a comer; y ni más, ni menos las casillas, y sótanos de las rameras, que también engañan a estos, dándoles a entender que son mujeres honestas . . . fácilmente se engaña el que tiene codicia de una cosa, y da por ella más de lo que vale; y el que engaña, muestra voluntad, y gana de una cosa, y hace otra . . . el engañado siempre queda perdidoso; y según Carolo Bouilio, es palabra Francesa. *Engigniet, id est, fallere ab ingenio*; porque el que engaña, es ingenioso, y astuto. Engañarse, no estar cierto en la verdad. Engañoso, lo falso. Engañador, el burlador.” The Covarrubias’ dictionary I quote here is available online at <https://archive.org/stream/A253315#page/n13/mode/2up>. For the entry on *engaño*, see page 352. I modernized some of the spelling to facilitate reading.

that Covarrubias' definition addressed both deception and self-deception. In its reflexive form, *engañarse*, self-deception is defined as to not be certain about the truth, or to have a wrong idea about reality. Although the definition by Covarrubias does not allude to religious deception, it is clear from accusatory documents against visionaries that, in the context of religion, deception and self-deception were regularly considered as two sides of the same coin.

Women who claimed to receive supernatural gifts were often depicted as being either deceivers or as self-deceived. In the first case, female tricksters were attributed with the intention of gaining recognition and fame, and with the attempt to use religious devotion to improve their socio-economic status. In the second scenario, the cause of deception would often be attributed either to the devil or to the feverish imagination of the female nature. The second half of Spain's sixteenth century was no longer a welcoming backdrop for women's reports of visions and raptures.²⁸ In fact, Teresa's lifetime coincided with the Church's hardening position regarding mysticism and supernatural phenomena. Suspicions around the legitimacy of her account did not take long to rise, and like most women's stories of extraordinary spiritual experiences, some theologians considered hers as deceptive. The detailed descriptions of numerous visions prompted in Teresa's confessors the question of the authenticity of her story. Teresa herself often fueled this question with her own doubts on the origin and meaning of her visions.²⁹ However, the discourse of religious authorities was not monolithic. The limits between authentic and inauthentic spiritual experiences, as well as between orthodoxy and heterodoxy were porous and unclear.

²⁸ For a general overview of religious women in Spain, see Stephen Haliczer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain*, and Mary E. Giles, *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*.

²⁹ Alison Weber has explained these self-depreciatory remarks (including her failure to say if her experiences were divine or not) as part of Teresa's rhetorical strategies. Weber specifically mentions a rhetoric of incompetence and a rhetoric of obedience. See *Rhetoric of Femininity*, especially chapters 2, 4, and 5.

To understand the reaction of religious authorities elicited by Teresa's account, it is necessary to revise the changes that had occurred in the religious landscape during the first part of the sixteenth century. The circulating religious discourses in Spain had been radically different up until the early 1500s, right around the time of Teresa's birth. Back then, mysticism had experienced a golden age, particularly under the protection of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517).³⁰ From his position as Inquisitor General, confessor to Queen Isabel of Castile, and Archbishop of Toledo, Cisneros exerted a powerful influence on the spiritual atmosphere of his time.³¹ He championed a spiritual reform that was led by members of the Franciscan order, to which he belonged, by promoting forms of religiosity that would later be considered controversial and even unorthodox. For instance, Cisneros sponsored the publication and translation of treatises by Italian women mystics, such as Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena, and ensured the protection of Spanish women mystics such as Sor María de Santo Domingo and Madre Juana de la Cruz (Howe 284-6).

Cisneros unequivocally defended the legitimacy of accounts of visionary women. In her introduction to Madre Juana de la Cruz's sermons, Religious Studies scholar Jessica A. Boon has noted that Cisneros authorized the publication of Saint Vincent Ferrer's *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, but left out the part in which the saint warned against spiritual visions and revelations (Cruz 12). Moreover, his defense of visionary women didn't make a distinction between nuns and *beatas*. *Beatas* were laywomen who held a reputation for holiness, but that acted independently from religious orders (Ahlgren 9-10). Most were widows or unmarried women who sought an

³⁰ For information on the reforms by Cisneros and their impact, see Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez, *La siembra mística del Cardenal Cisneros y las reformas en la Iglesia*; Erika Rummel, *Jiménez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain's Golden Age*; and the recently published book by Joseph Pérez, *Cisneros, el cardenal de España*.

³¹ Inquisitor General between 1505-1515; confessor to Queen Isabel of Castile between 1492-1495; Archbishop of Toledo between 1495-1517.

alternative to the binary option between marriage and the cloister. These women observed some kind of religious life, either by themselves or in the company of other women (Muñoz 6). *Beatas* devoted their lives to contemplation and prayer, and some of them claimed to have spiritual visions and prophetic gifts. A few of these *beatas* came to exert an extraordinary social and political influence, so much so that both secular and religious authorities felt the need to intervene in several of these cases, as will be discussed. There were some spectacular cases, such as that of the mentioned Sor María de Santo Domingo, known as “La beata de Piedrahíta.” Although Sor María was processed by the Inquisition, Cardinal de Cisneros intervened on her behalf and obtained her absolution.

Cisneros endorsed the publication and translation of many other spiritual treatises, some of which would later suffer the censorship of the 1559 Valdés Index of Prohibited Books. The Index banned the publication and circulation of important works that Teresa and other religious figures recognized as useful to the development of various methods of prayer.³² Gillian Ahlgren has examined the possibility that Teresa may have written in part motivated by the need to fill the void on spiritual treatises created by the Valdés Index (*Politics of Sanctity* 33). But regardless of Teresa’s intentions, her writings did in fact become new spiritual manuals that drew from some of the religious ideas sponsored by Cisneros’ reform. In her writings, Teresa explained the practice of mental prayer as a path to achieve union with God. By the second half of the sixteenth century, there was an ongoing debate on the benefits and dangers of mental prayer. Some theologians considered it a distraction from vocal prayer and a potential gateway to heresy, while others

³² Scholars Rosa María Alabrús and Ricardo García Cárcel mention the following titles among Teresa’s most beloved books: *Tercer abecedario espiritual* by Francisco de Osuna; *La subida al monte Sión* by Bernardino de Laredo; *Vía Spíritu* by Bernabé de Palma; *Arte para servir a Dios* by Alonso de Madrid; *Oratorio de religiosos* by Antonio de Guevara; Luis de Granada’s *Guía de Pecadores*; and *Tratado de la oración y meditación* by Teresa’s dear friend Peter of Alcántara. Not all of these titles were censored by the Valdés Index. See *Teresa de Jesús: La construcción de la santidad femenina*, especially page 187.

defended its validity. Teresa advocated for it and dedicated a large part of her work to its teaching (Ahlgren, *Politics of Sanctity* 87-9).

Simultaneously, Teresa's method of mental prayer was based on *recogimiento*, a spiritual practice developed under the Franciscan reform backed by Cisneros. Religious scholars have traditionally defined *recogimiento* in contrast with *dejamiento*, and these definitions have typically addressed the durability of the effects of each method, the activity or passivity of the powers, and the presence or absence of external rituals that accompany the process of mental prayer. While *recogimiento* has been associated with an active disposition of the devotee's powers, short and temporary effects of union between God and the soul, and with the presence of external rituals in the process, *dejamiento* has been defined by the opposite—that is, by the passivity of the powers, by a long-lasting and even definitive union between the soul and God, and with the absence of external rituals. Scholars have also established that the practice of *recogimiento* was confined to the realm of Franciscan reform, while they have linked *dejamiento* to the heretical group of *alumbrados*.³³

This heretical group has challenged historians' and religious scholars' attempts at establishing a clear definition of what exactly their practices and beliefs were. Jessica Boon has demonstrated that scholarly attempts to define *alumbrados* rely on the Inquisition's Edict of 1525, in which religious authorities attributed four common beliefs to this group: "refusal to believe in hell, rejection of church rituals, iconoclasm, and the spiritual practice of *dejamiento*" (56). Inquisitors accused *alumbrados* of discarding the need for an intermediary between believers and

³³ For a thorough history of scholarly definitions of *dejamiento* and *recogimiento*, see Jessica A. Boon, *The Mystical Science of the Soul*, especially pages 55-9. Her definition of these concepts is the most convincing and comprehensive yet: "The primary distinction between *dejamiento* and *recogimiento* is not whether external rituals do or do not accompany the particular process of mental prayer, nor whether the union is presumed to be permanent or periodic. Rather, *recogimiento* draws heavily on scientific epistemology as the basis for a practical approach to seeking union with a God found at the center of the soul, while *dejamiento*'s rejection of the body is a negation of all that is human, including basic 'truths' of Renaissance cognitive processes" (59).

God, and thus, for the entire institution of the Catholic Church. Participants were also accused of claiming to receive the direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit, which illuminated them (hence the label) when reading the Scriptures. What inquisitors saw as capricious interpretations of the Bible, *alumbrados* argued were, in fact, revelations. With the 1525 edict, the Inquisition turned *alumbradismo* into a crime. In time, church authorities came to use it as a blanket term that included different kinds of heterodox beliefs and practices.³⁴

The thread of events starting with the death of Cardinal de Cisneros in 1517, followed by the Protestant Reformation, and the issuing of the 1525 Edict, marked the end of ecclesial acceptance and tolerance of devout forms of spirituality. The Church began to harden its stance on heterodoxy and dissent, largely in response to the threat posed by Protestantism. This shift became painfully evident in the official attitudes towards, among others, *beatas* and women visionaries; methods of mental prayer, particularly if they were written and published; unauthorized spiritual practices or beliefs, namely *dejamiento* and *alumbradismo*. To make matters worse, *alumbradismo* became especially popular among Jewish *conversos*, in particular during its early stages, which meant *alumbrados* were suspected of both Judaizing and of practicing *dejamiento*.³⁵ Some women also gained notoriety among *alumbrados*, and they seem to have played relevant roles within the group. Hispanist Alison Weber identified as the two most important sociological features of

³⁴ Gillian Ahlgren and Alison Weber have suggested that the term *alumbrado* became a category used for prosecution by the Inquisition. It began as a reference to those persecuted for religious experiences that were linked to visions, raptures, and revelations, and consequently, to deception. Later, other offenses, particularly of sexual connotation were also ascribed to the term. For a discussion on the definition of *alumbrados* see: Ahlgren's *Politics of Sanctity*, especially pages 9-15; Ahlgren's edition of Francisca de los Apóstoles trial, especially pages 1-5; Weber's "Demonizing Ecstasy," especially pages 141-2, and her famous *Rhetoric of Femininity*, especially pages 22-25; and José Luis Sánchez Lora, *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca*, especially page 349. For more on *alumbrados* see: Mary Giles' edition of *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*; Alistair Hamilton, "The *Alumbrados*: *Dejamiento* and its Practitioners;" Álvaro Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados*; and Antonio Márquez, *Los alumbrados: orígenes y filosofía, 1525-1559*. A useful synthesis of *alumbrado* historiography is found in Mercedes García-Arenal and Felipe Pereda's "A propósito de los alumbrados: Confesionalidad y disidencia religiosa en el mundo ibérico."

³⁵ These early stages refer to the period between 1520s and 1540s. See Angela Selke, "El iluminismo de los conversos y la Inquisición. Cristianismo interior de los alumbrados: Resentimiento y sublimación."

Spanish *alumbradismo* its significant popularity among *conversos*, and its assignment of women in leadership ranks (*Rhetoric* 22-3). Other scholars have discussed whether these women were predominantly teachers and interpreters of the Scriptures or visionaries, but their circumstance was still problematic as it contravened Paul's dictum.³⁶ And although not all *alumbradas* were necessarily experiencing visions or raptures, many visionary women during the latter part of the sixteenth century were accused of being *alumbradas*. Teresa was one of them. At times, accusations of *alumbradismo* against women dealt with sexual misconduct, but some other times they implied possession by the devil or deception.³⁷

The controversy around visionary nuns and *beatas* reached its peak in the late sixteenth century, especially in the last two decades, with the case of the infamous Magdalena de la Cruz. One of the nuns in Teresa's Salamanca convent, Ana de la Trinidad, testified during Teresa's beatification and canonization hearings that after being compared to Magdalena de la Cruz and warned about the possibility of having a similar fate, Teresa, unaltered, replied that "not once do I remember her without shaking" (*Procesos*, 43-4).³⁸ Magdalena de la Cruz (1487-1560) was a Franciscan nun whose reputation for holiness spread throughout Spain and even reached the royal family. It was reported that the future King Philip II was wrapped with her cloth at his birth, at King Charles I's explicit request. Many miracles were attributed to her, including impossible fasts, a failed attempt to crucify herself at age ten, and numerous prophecies. Quite famously, in her youth she predicted the death of King Ferdinand, and the regency of Archbishop Cisneros. But perhaps her most famous feat was a pregnancy she attributed to the Holy Spirit, and the birth of a

³⁶ See for instance María Águeda Méndez "Ilusas y alumbradas"; Stefania Pastore's "Mujeres, lecturas y alumbradismo radical," and most recently, Mercedes García-Arenal and Felipe Pereda's "A propósito de los alumbrados."

³⁷ The Inquisition published a new edict against a group of *alumbrados* in Seville in 1623. By this time, the definition of *alumbradismo*, as Andrew Keitt has pointed out, covered many infractions: "atheism, witchcraft, blasphemy, and bigamy." See *Inventing the Sacred*, especially p. 81.

³⁸ "Nunca vez me acuerdo de ella que no tiemble."

holy child on Christmas eve, whom was taken to heavens, by her own account. After she fell gravely ill in 1544, Magdalena confessed to having been possessed by the devil since her childhood. This alleged possession continued for forty years, and Magdalena's admission to her dealings with the devil was thoroughly documented by the Inquisition. After a two year trial Magdalena was condemned, in 1546, during an *auto de fe* to spending the rest of her life secluded in a convent (Imirizaldu 30-62).

Another important case is that of María de la Visitación, the celebrated "monja de Lisboa." María (1551-?), a Dominican nun who lived in Lisbon, gained notoriety in Spain and even around Europe because of her cross-shaped stigmas, and the many prophecies and miracles attributed to her. Fray Luis de Granada was among her admirers and became her promoter and biographer. Her fame reached its zenith during the latter part of the century, around the time of Teresa's death. In 1580, María de la Visitación publicly denounced King Philip II for annexing the Kingdom of Portugal. This was, arguably, the beginning of her downfall. It is likely that Philip, challenged by her opposition and defied by her exhortation to restore the Portuguese throne to the Braganza family, urged inquisitors to look into her case. The Inquisition condemned her in 1588, after finding her stigmata were forged. She was sentenced to spending the rest of her life in seclusion in a convent in Lisbon.³⁹

Magdalena de la Cruz and María de la Visitación were among the most public and infamous cases of fraudulent visionary women, but they were by no means the only ones. Their widespread popularity is important, not only because they deeply affected the lives of other women—especially of visionaries such as Teresa—, but also because they provide a useful insight to the changing religious atmosphere of Spain's sixteenth century. Notable cases of nuns and *beatas*

³⁹ See Imirizaldu, especially pp. 177-97, and also Fray Luis de Granada's *Historia de Sor María de la Visitación y Sermón de las caídas públicas*.

embaucadoras (duping nuns and *beatas*) are a testament as to how the Church had hardened its position in the face of supernatural phenomena. The official support of mystic women seen during the early years of the sixteenth century turned into the sour fears and apprehensions of many theologians regarding visionary women by the latter part of the century. Scholars Rosa María Alabrús and Ricardo García Cárcel have characterized religious authorities' suspicions about the sincerity of women's visions as obsessive (37).

By the 1580s, many confessors worried that accounts of supernatural phenomena could lead to a potential encounter with the Inquisition, and clerics had to make sure that they were not being deceived by the women who confessed with them. Their reputation too was on the line. The debate over the legitimacy of extraordinary experiences such as visions and raptures gained momentum as ecclesial authorities were unable to reach a consensus. Opposing factions that simultaneously tried to control and challenge the official religious discourse emerged and consolidated. Many confessors regarded with alarm stories of spiritual raptures, while some others encouraged and defended their visionary penitents.

These conflicting attitudes towards the role of supernatural phenomena were the expression of a larger divide within the Catholic Church. Iberian theologians debated on issues as fundamental to Christianity as mental prayer, heresy, gender roles, and unsanctioned forms of spirituality. Teresa easily distinguished between two contending attitudes among her own confessors regarding prayer and spiritual phenomena: *letrados* and *espirituales*.⁴⁰ The first group, *letrados*, defended the prevalence of theological knowledge over all other forms of religious expression, and the adherence to the Catholic dogma as expressed in the Council of Trent. The second group accepted

⁴⁰ Teresa made numerous references to these two groups, although she never offered a definition for either one of them. For references to *espirituales*, see *Life*, 23.3 and *Life* 17.9. For an important reference to *letrados* see *Life*, chapter 13, and especially 13.18.

and promoted a more spiritual, and thus, less doctrinal path to the knowledge of God. *Espirituales* embraced religious experience, and they accepted and even encouraged practices such as *recogimiento* and mental prayer. They did not necessarily advocate for supernatural phenomena, but did not condemn mystical experiences.⁴¹ By midcentury, it was obvious that the *letrados* who defended a stricter adherence to orthodoxy had gained much control over religious discourse. *Espirituales* instead were finding themselves increasingly under the attack and suspicions of the Inquisition, which became a machinery designed to regulate religious expression, operated by rigorous *letrados*.

When Deception Comes as an Angel of Light

What was perceived as a proliferation of deceitful visionaries—of feigned sanctity, as Andrew Keitt has termed the phenomenon—along with the lack of clear institutional boundaries between heresy/orthodoxy, and legitimate/illegitimate spiritual experiences, marked the religious panorama during Teresa’s time with turmoil and uncertainty. Cases like those of Magdalena de la Cruz and María de la Visitación fueled the prevalent fear that the devil could use all sorts of wiles—including the appearance of holiness, especially in women—to deceive believers. Moreover, *letrados* found justification for this idea in Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians: “For such false apostles are deceitful workmen, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder: for Satan himself transformeth himself into an angel of light” (*Douay-Rheims Bible*, 2 Cor. 11:13-14). Paul had cautioned believers against the evil spirit, restless in his attempts

⁴¹ Ahlgren is especially clear in her definition of *letrados* and *espirituales*: “Suspicion of mystical experience in general was a hallmark of . . . *letrados* . . . who understood religious faith as a matter of doctrine rather than of personal experience. In general, they discouraged speculation on theological issues among the laity and suggested that the pursuit of virtue ought to be the main focus of their devotion. The *letrados* were opposed by the *espirituales*, who focused less on doctrine than on mystical prayer, and taught that all Christians had a responsibility to grow in knowledge of God” (*Politics of Sanctity* 14).

to deviate devotees from God. It is also noteworthy that, just a few lines earlier, Paul had referred to Eve's deception, thus admonishing his Corinth community of women's proclivity to fall prey to the devil's tricks. Women and deception were as inextricably connected for Paul as for sixteenth-century Spanish theologians.

And while Paul had warned against deception, it was John who exhorted believers to test what they saw to avoid being deceived. In his first epistle, he advised: "Dearly beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God" (*Douay-Rheims Bible*, 1 John 4). This passage eventually became fundamental for the "discernment of spirits," a method established by religious authorities to determine the legitimacy of supernatural phenomena such as visions, prophecies, and raptures. It is important to note that, in the tradition of Paul, the discernment of spirits is not so much a method as a grace gifted from God to certain individuals. Thomas of Aquinas adopted this view. Only in the late middle ages the discernment of spirits started to become an organized system (Keitt 56-66).⁴² The long theological tradition of the discernment spirits includes prominent scholars such as Augustine of Hippo, Thomas of Aquinas, and Henry of Langenstein.⁴³ But it was Jean Gerson who wrote the most influential work for early modern Europeans on the discernment of spirits (Copeland and Machielsen 5). Gerson (1363-1429), was a renowned French theologian and chancellor of the University of Paris. He designed what came to be during Spain's sixteenth century a well-known method for the categorization of supernatural phenomena. His system, which he acknowledged was not infallible, was based on the idea that it was necessary—even

⁴² For a comprehensive study of the discernment of spirits see Nancy Caciola's *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*.

⁴³ The discernment of spirits is now a long standing tradition within Christianity. In fact, much too long to be explained here. For an overview of its development in Spain and the rest of Europe, see Sluhovsky's *Believe Not Every Spirit*, especially chapters 6 and 7. Augustine addresses the issue of discernment in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*; Aquinas does so in *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 111, and II-III, q. 171-3 (see especially article 5 of both 171 and 172); and Henry of Langenstein in *Unterscheidung der Geister*.

urgent—to distinguish true from false revelations, to determine the meaning of such phenomena, and to classify it according to its divine, forged, or evil origin (Sluhovsky 175-6).

Gerson's work on the discernment of spirits is divided mainly into three treatises: "On Distinguishing True from False Revelations" (1401-2), "On the Testing of Spirits" (1415), and "On the Examination of Doctrine" (1423).⁴⁴ Throughout these works, he defended a progressively harsher position towards women. On his first treaty, Gerson suggested, in conformity with his time, that women were more prone than men to be deceived by their weak nature and by the devil. On his last treaty he concluded that women, in general, were altogether unable and unqualified to determine the origin and meaning of religious phenomena (Elliott 29). Dyan Elliott has emphasized the importance of Gerson's historical context, marked by the papal schism, as a partial explanation for his misogynistic attitude. This unsteady situation might have created a void that visionary women seized to publicly voice their opinions on both political and religious issues. Elliott has suggested that the popularization of a more public female spirituality, largely based on prophecies and visions, could have motivated Gerson to write a theory of the discernment of spirits that would restore religious and political authority back to the educated clergy (32).⁴⁵

Gerson became an influential source for early modern Spanish theologians, and his treatises on the discernment of spirits became a guide consulted by confessors who dealt with visionary penitents (Sluhovsky 180-8). Francisco de Osuna, Martín de Castañega, Pedro Ciruelo, Teresa's ally John of Ávila, and Diego Pérez de Valdivia, were among those who wrote on the discernment of spirits in Spain.⁴⁶ On the whole, the consolidation of a tradition of the discernment of spirits

⁴⁴ See Sluhovsky, especially pages 175-6; Paschal Boland's work, *The Concept of Discretio Spirituum in John Gerson*; and for Gerson's treatises, *De distinctione verarum revelationum a falsis*, *De probatione spirituum*, and *De examinatione doctrinarum*, see his *Oeuvres complètes* edited by Palémon Glorieux.

⁴⁵ Elliott's point is further developed in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism*.

⁴⁶ Francisco de Osuna discussed the problem of discernment of spirits (*discernimiento*) in his *Tercer abecedario spiritual*; Castañega in his *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechicerías*; Pedro Ciruelo in his *Reproución de las*

was decisive in the shaping of Teresa's time. Paul and John's epistles were the foundation for the backlash against some of Cardinal de Cisneros' reforms. On the one hand, the apostles had warned about the power of the devil, whose main purpose was to deceive. The image of the "angel of light" was not only a representation of the wide range of artifices available to the devil against the faithful, but it expressed the paradoxical idea that he could hide beneath the appearance of something sacred. Christians had to be cautious. Secondly, the passages contained a warning on the unreliability of the senses. What comes to the mind and the soul through the senses has to be taken in with prudence. Finally, there was the reminder of women's disposition to be easily deceived. The discourse on the discernment of spirits, built around these premises, determined the way in which women visionaries such as Teresa would be dealt with in sixteenth-century Spain.

Notorious cases concerning the discernment of spirits, such as those of stigmata, levitations, and other displays of supernatural phenomena, would often result in the intervention of the Inquisition. They proved to be especially troubling because they were appealing to large audiences and had the potential to rapidly become public spectacles. Ecclesial authorities feared that ignorant laypeople could be easily deceived by such manifestations.⁴⁷ As previously indicated, *letrados* observed two ways in which deception in visionaries could operate: the visionary could deliberately seek to deceive and mislead the public to attain a reputation for holiness, some degree of social power, and economic benefits, or it could be that the visionaries themselves were

supersticiones y hechizertas; John of Ávila in his *Audi filia*; and Diego Pérez de Valdivia in his *Aviso de gente recogida*. For an overview of the development of the discussion on the discernment of spirits in early modern Spain, see Sluhovsky, especially pages 180-8.

⁴⁷ Sluhovsky quotes Pérez de Valdivia who claimed "For if there are no crowds, there are not possessed women." In this particular instance, Pérez de Valdivia was addressing exorcists, who would often perform extravagant and spectacular exorcisms. See Sluhovsky, p. 187. Keitt also discusses the problem of public visions and raptures: "Revelations in the plaza presented a greater danger than revelations behind convent walls because such public displays of religious enthusiasm carried with them greater potential to lead the flock astray if they turned out to be false. As a result, the activities of these women were the focus of considerable scrutiny by post-Tridentine church authorities" (98).

deceived, either by the devil, by their own imagination, or, in the case of women, by the weakness of their sex (Keitt 2). The Inquisition punished visionaries who were found to be forging their spiritual experiences, although sentences were generally mild (Keitt 112). If instead, inquisitors considered that the visionaries were being deceived by the devil, confessors would recommend a series of remedies that could range from rest, to penitence, to visiting a healer, to dietary prescriptions, and even to exorcism (Sluhovsky, part I).

The nuances of each case allowed religious authorities to approach their visionary penitents in a number of different ways, but Gerson's method was an attempt to establish, at least theoretically, a guideline that would allow confessors to distinguish between true and false revelations, and between deceitful and deceived visionaries. The method developed by Gerson and the whole discourse on the discernment of spirits sealed the fate of many penitents who claimed to have mystical experiences. Teresa was no exception. Her official accusers, as it will be discussed in chapter 3, heavily relied on Gerson's ideas to discern the origin and meaning of the visions that she reported. These accusers, who formally brought her case to the Inquisition, considered the possibility that she was either a deceiver or a victim of the devil's deceit. The conclusions they reached were influenced, not only by their interpretation of the warnings from apostles Paul and John, or by Gerson's treatises, but also by Teresa's rhetoric. Teresa insistently wrote about her fear of being deceived, and of the dread she felt when confessors thought of her as a deceiver. But it was precisely the fact that she voiced these fears what contributed to her exoneration from being categorized as deceiver and what paved the way for her canonization. This, I argue, is one of the effects of Teresa's rhetoric of deception.

The Evolution of Teresa's Rhetoric of Deception

Deception remained at the core of Teresa's life, and at that of all visionary women in early modern Spain. The question of their authenticity was always at stake, and it triggered long and heated discussions that continued well after the death of visionaries. In some cases, such discussions were fueled by a campaign to promote the visionary's canonization, as was the case with Teresa. In general, theologians and inquisitors used the concept of deception as a weapon to control religious discourse, and consequently, the fates of many visionary women were sealed by the official interpretation of their visions as being deceptive. Teresa was acutely aware of this dangerous predicament, and she chose to tackle the problem of deception in her life and in her writings. I have dedicated chapter 2 to the study of Teresa's use of the concept of deception in her works, so my goal in the following pages is to outline the evolution of Teresa's rhetoric of deception over time.

In the last part of this chapter, we will see how Teresa defended the legitimacy of her visions through a redefinition of deception. This redefinition implied simultaneously the challenging and partial adoption of the official religious discourse. What is more paradoxical still is that, while Teresa largely took for granted the authenticity of her supernatural gifts, her attitude towards reports of visions and raptures by some of the nuns in her convents was of skepticism and even suspicion. She especially feared that the mishandling of such reports could threaten her reforming project. And yet, rather than denouncing her visionary nuns as deceivers, Teresa explained their accounts of supernatural experiences as the result of physical illness, specifically melancholy. She appointed the prioresses in her convents as the ideal managers of such cases. In many ways, it is clear that Teresa considered prioresses as more reliable and prudent than confessors. But she also prescribed obedience and humility as quintessential virtues that should be

practiced by the visionary and everyone in the convent. It was crucial to state that the nuns were under the submission of male superiors.

The importance of deception for Teresa is evident in the prevalent appearance it makes in her written work. The terms *engaño* and *engañar* (deception and deceive) appear close to 90 times in *The Book of Her Life*. The terms *certidumbre* or *certinidad* (certitude or certainty), in contrast, appear only 6 times. To understand the proportion in which *engaño* appears in Teresa's autobiography, it might be useful to establish a few comparisons: the term *oración* (prayer) appears over 360 times; *demonio* (devil) over 150; *confesor* (confessor) over 80; *enferma* or *enfermedad* (sick or sickness) over 40; *pensamiento* (thought) over 30. In her more mature works, Teresa is less concerned about her own self-deception, and is more worried about the legitimacy of the visions of some of the nuns in her convents. It is likely that she feared that visionary nuns could put in jeopardy the success of the reform. This might explain why in *The Interior Castle*, the term *engaño* and its derivatives appear 57 times; one third less than in *The Book of Her Life*. In *The Book of Foundations*, the last book Teresa wrote, the term appears only 32 times.

In her writings, Teresa indicated that the experience of visions and raptures compelled her to consider the possibility that she could be deceived, either by her own imagination or by the devil. Even if this concern about the prospect of deception was merely rhetorical, employed by the Carmelite only to diminish suspicions against her, it led Teresa to discuss her spiritual experiences with confessors, which put her in a risky situation. Some of these confessors, especially during the early stages of her reports of supernatural phenomena, attributed her visions to the devil, as was the case with cleric Gaspar Daza and the layman Francisco de Salcedo, who were convinced that Teresa's visions came from the devil (*Life* 23.14). Some others believed they were divine gifts. The first one was Jesuit Diego de Cetina, with whom Teresa consulted right after hearing from

Daza that her visions were demonic. After Cetina came many others, including García de Toledo, Domingo Báñez, and Pedro Ibáñez. Teresa was also lucky to have received the approval from the renowned ascetic Francis Borgia, who visited her in Avila right around the time when she was confessing with Cetina. Borja talked to Daza and Salcedo, which might have persuaded them of the divine origin of Teresa's experiences (*Life* 23.16 and 24.4). Over time, Teresa gained enough confidence to believe in the divine origin of her experiences, and she even declared that those who were invested in a spiritual journey would inevitably encounter the devil's tricks: "But what obstacles and what fears puts the devil before those who want to get to God!" (*Life* 23.25).⁴⁸

Teresa was not alone in upholding this belief. Some of the reformers that came before her had also defended this idea of an almost proportional relation between deception and prayer, or demonic intervention and spiritual development. Historian Moshe Sluhovsky has claimed that "Saint Teresa agreed with Osuna that demons attack contemplatives and try to prevent them from advancing. The devil, she explained, plays special tricks on practitioners of mental prayer. In fact, the more advanced they are, the more severe his attacks" (140). Teresa explained the possibility of being deceived by the devil as the direct consequence of the pursuit of God. The more she struggled to advance on her spiritual practice, the more susceptible she became to the devil's deceit. In this way, Teresa proposed, if not a redefinition of deception, at least an unforeseeable consequence of it that allowed her to appropriate ecclesial language, but adapt it to a convenient defense of mental prayer and visionary activity. Astoundingly, if we follow Teresa's rhetoric of deception, the devil's attempts to deceive her ended up validating her spiritual progress, and ultimately became a natural outcome of her faith. Deception was to be expected *precisely* because she strove to get closer to God. This logic challenged the official discourse on the discernment of

⁴⁸ "Mas ¡qué de embarazos pone el demonio y qué de temores a quien se quiere llegar a Dios!"

spirits, not by opposing it, but by redefining its limits. It questioned the definition of deception as a mark of illegitimate visions and turned it into a strategy that visionaries could use to legitimize their own spiritual experiences.

This reasoning, that those who were invested in getting to know God suffer more attempts by the devil to deceive them, also served as a resolution for fears of self-deception. In *The Book of Her Life* Teresa had repeatedly expressed the uncertainty over the possibility that her visions would be a trick by the devil, but this doubt is always referred in the past. The implicit point of view from which she wrote was that of someone who had conquered the fear of self-deception. Furthermore, she argued that God would not let one that strives to seek Him to be permanently deceived (*Life* 23.15 and *Foundations* 4.3-4). We can only speculate as to how Teresa came to be convinced of the divine origin of her spiritual experiences. It is possible that she never truly doubted their authenticity, and that her reflections on those initial fears of self-deception were nothing but a rhetorical strategy that would win her the favor of male authorities. In fact, Teresa did obtain the approval from some of her confessors and other important religious figures that had personally met her, such as ascetics Peter of Alcántara and Francis Borgia, and preacher John of Ávila.⁴⁹ These men avowed the legitimacy of Teresa's visions and raptures. Their support might have helped to justify Teresa's implicit overcoming of her fears of self-deception. In her written work,

⁴⁹ A contemporary of Teresa, John of Ávila (1500-1569) only became Doctor of the Church in 2012. He had been largely forgotten by scholars and by the Catholic Church, despite his great influence in early modern Iberian figures and religious reformers, among which we can count Ignacio de Loyola, Fray Luis de Granada, Juan de Dios, Peter of Alcántara, and Francis Borgia. Avila became famous for his powerful sermons, as well as for having successfully endured trial by the Inquisition. See Rady Roldán-Figueroa, *The Ascetic Spirituality of Juan de Ávila (1499-1569)*; and David Coleman, "Moral Formation and Social Control in the Catholic Reformation." Canonized with Teresa in 1622, Peter of Alcántara was renowned for his extreme penitence. He had the support and admiration of King Charles V. Just like Teresa, he faced strong opposition for his reforming project. See José Antonio Calvo Gómez, "El modelo de la santidad de la Contrarreforma y la construcción de la nación española." Canonized in 1671, 49 years after Teresa's canonization, Francis Borgia (1510-1572) was Duke of Gandía, Viceroy of Catalonia, and one of Spain's grandees. He was also Superior General of the Society of Jesus. His renouncement of all political appointments and to nobility titles gained him a widespread reputation of holiness, but also numerous troubles with King Charles V and with officials of the Catholic Church. For information on his troubles with the Inquisition see Doris Moreno, "Francisco de Borja y la Inquisición."

Teresa never doubted the authenticity of her visions in the present tense. Moreover, she often took for granted the divine origin of her experiences, and about one of her visions she claimed that “if they would cut me into pieces, I could not believe it was the devil” (*Life*, 29.6).⁵⁰

If we are to believe Teresa’s declaration, she may have found reassurance for the legitimacy of her visions in the visions themselves. But Teresa struggled for many years with the possibility of deception, and not just her own. She knew about the harsh accusations of deception that were directed towards visionary women, and about the terrible consequences that they could face. We have seen, for example, that she reacted to Magdalena de la Cruz’s infamous case. In consequence, Teresa remained very vigilant of the visionary activity reported by some of the nuns in her convents. Remarkably, after years of dealing with skeptic confessors who, referring to her visions, had warned her that the devil could transform into an angel of light, Teresa herself discussed this image of the angel of light at least once in *The Book of Her Life* (14.8), once again in *The Way of Perfection* (38.2), and three times in her more mature work, *The Interior Castle* (1.2.15, 5.1.1, and 5.1.5). In all of these instances she explicitly used this metaphor to caution her nuns about the potential danger of being deceived by the devil during prayer, especially through visions and raptures. In a way, Teresa echoed the discourse she had received from her superiors and passed it onto her nuns, perhaps as a rhetorical strategy that would divert unwanted interest from religious authorities, but perhaps also as a result of her becoming more suspicious of the raptures experienced by many religious young women.⁵¹

⁵⁰ “Si me hicieran pedazos no pudiera yo creer que era demonio.”

⁵¹ Weber provides enough evidence of Teresa’s hardening opinion on visions and raptures in her nuns on chapter 5 of *Rhetoric of Femininity*. See especially pages 137-140. Although Weber dedicated this chapter to the analysis of *The Book of Foundations*, the last work written by Teresa, the shift in her attitude towards raptures and visions in her nuns is evident since the 1570s, when she was writing *The Interior Castle*.

In the last decade of her life Teresa was especially aware of the many dangers that could come from unsupervised visionary activity. She wrote about the female weakness (*flaqueza*) that could lead some nuns to think that they were experiencing raptures (*arrobos*), when in fact they were being deceived by their own imaginations (*Foundations*, 6). Teresa worried that an incident of supernatural phenomena, if not handled properly, could lead to a public scandal, which in turn could have meant an intervention by the Inquisition, thus potentially endangering her entire reforming project. Alison Weber has examined the suspicions of Teresa regarding her visionary nuns, and also the measures she took to ensure these visions would not result in problems with religious authorities (*Rhetoric* 135-48 and “Autoridad carismática” 247-9). Rather than seeking the help of *letrados*, as she boastfully claimed to have done in chapter 23 of *The Book of Her Life* when her visions prompted her fears of self-deception, the more mature Teresa conveyed a cautious approach to visions. Whenever possible, she sought to deal with her visionary nuns directly herself, or otherwise through the prioresses. Weber has indicated that Teresa considered prioresses as the most reliable judges of the visionary nuns’ behavior and character, and she only let confessors get involved in such cases secondarily, mainly to preserve the appearance of submission to male authority (“Autoridad” 247). For these delicate matters, confessors were to be chosen by prioresses, who would select them based on their experience with visionary nuns, and most importantly, their prudence.

As Weber has pointed out, by the time Teresa finished writing *The Book of Foundations* in 1580, she did not fear as much that confessors would attribute to the devil the visions reported by her nuns, as they had done, according to her own account in *The Book of Her Life* written in the 1560s, with herself when she first reported supernatural visions. Instead, she worried about very gullible or greedy confessors, eager to profit economically or socially from penitents held as living

saints (“Autoridad” 247). Teresa had important reasons to fear the way in which confessors decided to handle supernatural phenomena. Unlike Discalced Carmelite nuns, confessors had the freedom to move around the city, and acted as bridges between convents and the general public. Teresa feared that imprudent confessors could spread rumors about potentially false visions beyond the cloister walls, thus jeopardizing her reforming project. In chapter 6 of *The Book of Foundations*, Teresa recalled a few significant stories of alleged visionary nuns. In the first one, a couple of her reformed nuns were convinced that they would die if they did not take the communion daily (6.9-13). In the second one, a nun from a different religious order suffered from frequent raptures that left her lying immobile on the ground for more than eight hours in a given day (6.14-15). In both cases, Teresa underscored the virtuous nature of the nuns, but also the incompetence of confessors, who did nothing to remedy the situation, and instead encouraged the nuns’ extremist behavior. She intervened in both instances, only to reveal that the nuns were not experiencing divine gifts, but rather, the deception from their own imagination. Teresa used these examples to remark the great danger derived from the improper management of the situation by the confessors, and to justify the close scrutiny of supposed visionary nuns by prioresses.

And yet, despite her insistent warnings on the visionary activity reported by nuns, the Carmelite never accused any of them of actively trying to deceive anyone. In fact, she defended the great virtue of the nuns in her two stories, and argued that faith, devotion, and behavior were not in themselves a warranty against self-deception (*Foundations* 6.9). The explanation Teresa provided for most cases of false supernatural experiences was melancholy. For her, false visions were not exclusively a matter of religious virtue, behavior, or faith. She also considered, in consonance with the medical treatises of her time, that too much mortification could alter the

bodily humors and cause melancholy (*Foundations* 7-10).⁵² In fact, Teresa dedicated the entire chapter 7 of *Foundations* to the matter of melancholy, which she entitled “Of how to deal with those [nuns] with melancholy. It is required for prioresses.”⁵³ The chapter is a pragmatic reflection on how to treat melancholic nuns. Teresa acknowledged that the female nature was more prone to the melancholic humor, which is why she prescribed firmness from the prioresses, but also rest, proper nutrition, and moderate penitence as remedies for the ailing nuns (*Rhetoric* 139). The chapter is also a testament to her entrustment of the problematic situation of female visionaries to prioresses, even over confessors.

But Teresa still feared that false visions could lead to the endangerment of her reform. In chapters 7 and 8 of *Foundations* she also expressed her dread of the scandal from mishandled false visionaries. She insisted heavily on the need for prudence, humility, and obedience. These essential virtues would act as barriers against the spread of the melancholic disease, as they led the false visionaries to follow orders from superiors, and promoted a culture of silence among all of the nuns in the convent concerning the deceptive visions. Furthermore, Teresa considered that the devil was not entirely disassociated from the problem of self-deception in nuns. But rather than seeing the evil spirit as the direct source of the nuns’ visions, Teresa explained this participation as their egotistical desire of celebrity, or as God’s plan to test the obedience and humility of the victims, and the faith of everyone in the convent. Teresa used this logic to contain severe cases of this illness. The prioresses should punish the melancholic nuns if they proved to be disobedient:

⁵² Perhaps the most popular medical treaty of Teresa’s time was Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de ingenios*, published in 1575. There were more than 10 circulating editions during the author’s time, and there are records of 60 editions, with translations to French, Italian, English, Latin, Dutch, and German. See José María Gondra, “Juan Huarte de San Juan y las diferencias de inteligencia.” For a general view of emotions and the body in early Modern Europe, see Gail Kern Pastor’s *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearian Stage*. For the specificities of this topic in Spain, see Elena Carrera’s “Madness and Melancholy in Sixteenth-and Seventeenth-century Spain: new evidence, new approaches.”

⁵³ “De cómo se han de haber con las que tienen melancolía. Es necesario para las preladas.”

“If words are not enough, let there be punishments; if small punishments won’t do, let them be strong; if a month of keeping [melancholic nuns] incarcerated won’t do, let them have four months, because there is no greater good that you can do to these souls” (*Foundations* 7.4). Teresa’s remedies could be relentless, but only if the self-deceived nuns proved to be relentless themselves. Teresa treated the problem of false visionaries with far more consideration than she ever received from some of her own confessors and superiors. It is unclear whether she did it out of compassion for the aspiring visionaries, or possibly to protect her religious reform, which could be threatened by a scandal of a false visionary.

The paradox here is that while Teresa’s spiritual visions were a key factor in her motivation to carry out her reforming project, the very same visions, if reported by her nuns, became a potential hazard for the reform. It was imperative for Teresa to interpret *and* manage the visionary activity of her nuns. This brings to the core of her interest: the nature of deception. The result was a considerable corpus that can be construed as her own method on the discernment of spirits, constituted mainly by chapters 4-8 of *The Book of Foundations*, and the sixth mansion (*morada*) of *The Interior Castle*. Despite a strong pushback from opponents who argued that she was spreading “wicked doctrines” and was contradicting Pauline silence by teaching about religious matters, Teresa gave instructions to apply her theories on the discernment of spirits in her convents.⁵⁴ Moreover, her discourse on the discernment of spirits questioned the inherent connection between women and deception. Teresa even crafted an audacious defense of women, but she acknowledged that female nature, due to its own physical limitations and humoral

⁵⁴ Felipe Segá, the Papal nuncio, considered “wicked” the doctrine of prayer taught by Teresa. See note 24. *The Interior Castle* has been considered as an instruction manual written for the nuns in Teresa’s reformed convents, mainly on contemplative prayer. The book also contained precise instructions to the prioresses as to how to deal with nuns who reported to receive divine gifts.

imbalances, was more prone to be deceived by either *flaqueza* (weakness) or imagination.⁵⁵ In a way, Teresa concluded that visionary women were deceived, rather than deceivers; the same conclusion that her own accusers drew about her, as we will see in chapter 3.

Conclusion

Teresa constitutes a remarkable example of the need that early modern visionary women had to resort to different rhetorical strategies to counter, refute, and respond to accusations of deception against them. Amidst an outstandingly unfavorable climate for women's reports of supernatural phenomena, Teresa managed to devise a rhetoric of deception, a series of strategic reflections on her spiritual experiences with the purpose of legitimizing them. Throughout her texts, Teresa crafted a complex web of repetitions of her fears and doubts about the origin of her visions, and a recurring declaration of *letrados* as the only rightful judges of her spiritual experiences (*Life* 23.3-7). All of this, combined with her continual avowal of obedience and humility as pivotal virtues for visionary women proved to be a strategy of crucial importance in the face of religious control. Despite the tight grip of church officials on visionary activity, Teresa was able to successfully open up a space for the defense of the authenticity of her religious experience. This defense benefited from the evident cracks that appeared on the surface of Spain's sixteenth-century religious discourse. Far from being monolithic, the official discourse from religious authorities kept feeding debates and creating factions within the Church, for instance, between *letrados* and *espirituales*, or between those who opposed and those who defended practices such as *recogimiento* and mental prayer.

⁵⁵ For Teresa's defense of women, see *Way E* 4.1. This famous passage is a remarkable apology of womanhood, and as could be expected, was crossed out from the original manuscript by one of Teresa's confessors. The passage is examined in chapter 2 of this work.

In her effort to reflect on the authenticity of her visionary experience, Teresa expressed the need to resort to confessors who would be excelling theologians or *letrados*, but she explained that certain matters about prayer could only be fully understood by those who had experience of it, thus defending the need of *espirituales*. Teresa also weighed in on the defense of mental prayer. Not only did she devise a whole method based on prayer to achieve spiritual union with God, but more importantly, she wrote about it and taught it in her reformed convents. Furthermore, in her rhetoric of deception, Teresa was also responding to the traditional discourse on the discernment of spirits. She refuted its idea of an inherent connection between women and evil, and rejected Gerson's opinion that women were deceivers or incapable of determining the origin of supernatural phenomena. Instead, Teresa developed her own method of the discernment of spirits, and made sure that her prioresses would apply it in her convents. According to this Teresian method of discernment, visions and raptures could often be the result of melancholy, which in turn was a common physiological reaction in women. Rather than perceiving her alleged visionary nuns as deceivers, Teresa defended women's spirituality, although she conceded that the female nature, unlike that of men, was more prone to being deceived, either by the devil or by their own imaginations.

Overall, Teresa successfully addressed her own doubts and fears regarding the origin and meaning of her visionary activity. She effectively convinced the officials of the Catholic church of the authenticity of her spiritual experiences. Her impressive success has been noted by her rapid canonization (1622), subsequently becoming Doctor of the Church (1970), and one of the most revered Catholic saints. But this resounding success has been, nevertheless, unsatisfactorily explained. I have argued here that Teresa's rhetoric of deception contributed to relieve her from some of the suspicions, prevalently misogynistic, of confessors and theologians that assessed her

visionary activity. But her rhetoric of deception was an endeavor that required a delicate balance: it had to simultaneously spare the legitimacy of her own visionary activity, and keep at bay the unwanted attention of church officials, in order to protect her reform. In a way, Teresa had to both embrace and challenge the discourse of deception from religious authorities. In the next chapter, I turn to the analysis of Teresa's texts to understand how, in order to do just that, she had to redefine the very concept of deception.

CHAPTER 3. TERESA'S REDEFINITION OF DECEPTION

The first time that the word “deception” appears in *The Book of Her Life* is in the subtitle for chapter 3: “How the Lord started to give her some light on the *deception* she had suffered”.⁵⁶ Deception (*engaño*) in this context refers to having lived, in Teresa’s words, immersed in a world of “vanities.” During her early youth, Teresa engaged in communications with a cousin who she expected to marry (*Life* 2.9). Precisely what her actions were is difficult to determine, as we rely solely on her own vague account of this episode, but it possibly entailed the typical courtship rituals of the time. Teresa, however, vehemently claimed in her text that her behavior put her honor (*honra*) at risk (*Life* 2.6).⁵⁷ Regardless of what might have happened, the situation was enough to prompt her father to temporarily put Teresa in a convent. The experience provided her with a platform from which she began to question the prospect of marriage, and the convent provided an appealing alternative. In her account of this episode, Teresa equaled wooing practices to a deceptive world, full of meaningless promises. In this context, the term “deception” emerges as a synonym for worldly life; a life of vanities and uncertainties. Throughout her work, Teresa frequently used the term in this sense, and it often implies a life not centered around God, a life of sin, or devoid of religious purpose. For Teresa, being deceived meant, above all else, to cease the pursuit of the ultimate goal of union with God.

⁵⁶ “En que trata . . . por qué manera comenzó el señor a darla alguna luz del *engaño* que había traído.” All italics are mine unless otherwise stated.

⁵⁷ For possible interpretations of what is known about Teresa’s youth see: Efrén de la Madre de Dios, *Santa Teresa por dentro*, especially chapter VII. Some Teresianist scholars, including de la Madre de Dios, have traditionally downplayed the extent and consequences of Teresa’s actions in this episode of courtship, while Antonio T. de Nicolás, who wrote the introduction to Victoria Lincoln’s *Teresa: A Woman* has gone as far as to claim that Teresa was not a virgin by the time she entered the convent (xiv). In truth, the extent to which she engaged in the process of courtship remains unknown. See Bárbara Mujica’s *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman*; Carole Slade, “Este gran Dios de las cavallerías;” and a recent dissertation by Kevin M. DePrinzio, O.S.A. “Your Word Pierced My Heart, and I Fell in Love: Teresa of Avila’s Reading of Augustine of Hippo’s ‘Confessions.’”

There were many other ways in which Teresa used “deception”, but the one described above is so prevalent that it could be labeled as the classic Teresian definition of the term. This identification of a worldly life with being deceived is found in all of her major works, and it could possibly be the meaning she most frequently assigned to the word.⁵⁸ However, Teresa allocated a wide variety of meanings to this term. She referred to deception as a state of confusing sin and virtue; as her incapacity, during a certain time in her life, to commit to prayer; as the opinions of others regarding mystical experiences; as the tricks of the devil; as the uncertainty of not knowing whether she was on the path to union with God; and as succumbing to sin and worldly life. The variation in the meaning assigned by Teresa to the term makes it worthy of a thorough analysis, which has not been made until now. Throughout this chapter, I analyze Teresa’s writings, especially *The Book of Her Life*, to argue that her redefinition of deception was aimed at legitimizing her activity as reformer, writer, and visionary.

Teresa recognized deception as a gendered category. She acknowledged that visionary women were subject to unjustified suspicions and often unfair treatment. But to get away with these denouncements, she also had to embrace the misogynistic discourse of her time. She blamed the frailty of the female condition for the possibility of deception, and this meant that visionary women had to remain doubtful about their visions. But precisely by using doubt as an authenticating response to the inherent connection between women and deception, Teresa distanced herself from heretical claims, particularly from those of *alumbrados*. Furthermore, she declared that only *letrados* could determine the legitimacy of visionary experiences, thus stating her full submission to the authority of the Church. And although she conceded that the devil’s deceiving tricks could

⁵⁸ Hans Flasche first pointed out Teresa’s excessive use of expressions of uncertainty. He mentions “ya me puedo engañar” (I could be deceiving myself) and “a mi paréceme” (it seems to me) among the most frequent. See “El problema de la certeza en el ‘Castillo interior.’”

also strike religious men, *letras* or formal knowledge was an effective antidote against deception. Finally, Teresa stressed the importance of humility as a quintessential virtue that helped to ensure the submission of the visionary to religious authorities, and to legitimize their reports of supernatural experiences. But she also made sure to demand humility from her own confessors and superiors, thus crafting an empowering redefinition and a broader delimitation of the virtue. In Teresa's highly sophisticated rhetoric of deception it is possible to evidence her strategies to counter accusations of deception while also confronting her own doubts of self-deception.

Deception and Gender

As discussed in the previous chapter, gender is a crucial concept that cuts across the entire problem of deception in Teresa of Avila and in other visionary women. Andrew Keitt has considered gender to be an "obvious category for analyzing the phenomenon of spiritual imposture" (5). Keitt has argued that the many preconceptions surrounding womanhood justified suspicions that made it far more likely for a woman than a man to be tried for religious deception (5-6). But Keitt has also underscored the nuances that individual cases bring out to light regarding the complex relation between confessors and penitents, inquisitors and prosecuted women. In the case of Teresa, we find some of her male directors acting as suspicious denouncers, while some others protected and openly admired her.⁵⁹ Teresa, on the other hand, simultaneously adopted the misogynistic discourse of her time, accused her male judges of being unjust and unreasonably mistrustful of women, and defended women's spirituality and virtue. In her groundbreaking work

⁵⁹ Weber mentions the Jesuit Gaspar Daza as one of Teresa's confessors who were first convinced of the diabolical nature of her visions (*Rhetoric* 43). But Teresa was talented at gaining the trust and confidence of her superiors. Among her confessors who, not only defended the divine origin of her visions, but that even adopted her form of prayer, were the Jesuit Baltasar Álvarez, the Dominicans García de Toledo, and Pedro Ibáñez, and notably, her dear friend and confidant, Discalced Carmelite Jerónimo Gracián. See also Aurora Egido. "Santa Teresa contra los letrados."

Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity, Alison Weber acknowledged this contradicting nature of Teresa's texts. Weber analyzed this aspect of Teresa as a champion for women by examining what many scholars have considered one of her most radical and even unorthodox statements on this matter: chapter 4 of *The Way of Perfection*. Because of the powerful declaration Teresa made in this part of her work, I reproduce it in its entirety, including the lines that were censored by her confessor:

I have confidence, my Lord, in these your servants who are here, for I see and know that they neither desire nor strive after anything but to please you. They have left whatever little they possessed for your sake, wishing they had more so that they might serve you with it. You are not ungrateful, my Creator, as for me to think that you would fail to do what they beseech of you, but I know that you will do far more. Nor did you despise women, Lord of my soul, when you were in this world, but always favored them with great compassion. And you found in them as much love [the following lines are crossed out] and more faith than in men, for there was also your most sacred Mother, from whose merits –and from wearing her habit– we derive merit, notwithstanding our sins that make us unworthy. Suffice it that the world has us cornered, and that we cannot do anything worthy of you in public, and that we dare not speak some truths about which we weep in secret, for you not to hear our just petition. I could not believe this, Lord, of your goodness and justice, for you are a fair judge, and not like the judges of this world who are, after all, sons of Adam and men, and as such they cannot but be suspicious of women's virtues. Yes, my King, someday all will be known. I do not speak on my own behalf, for the world knows my wickedness and I rejoice in that it should be known, but I see that the times are such that it is not right to dismiss virtuous and strong spirits, even if they are the spirits of women. [End of censored lines]. (*Way E 4.1*)⁶⁰

⁶⁰ “Confío yo, Señor mío, en estas siervas vuestras que aquí están, que veo y sé no quieren otra cosa ni la pretenden, sino contentaros; por Vos han dejado lo poco que tenían, y quisieran tener más para servirlos con ello. Pues no sois Vos, Criador mío, desagradecido para que piense yo daréis menos de lo que os suplican, sino mucho más; ni aborrecisteis, Señor de mi alma, cuando andabais por el mundo, las mujeres, antes las favorecisteis siempre con mucha piedad y hallasteis en ellas tanto amor [los siguientes renglones fueron censurados] y más fe que en los hombres, pues estaba vuestra sacratísima Madre en cuyos méritos merecemos, y por tener su hábito, lo que desmerecíamos por nuestras culpas. No basta Señor, que nos tiene el mundo acorraladas, que no hagamos cosa que valga nada por Vos en público, ni osemos hablar algunas verdades que lloramos en secreto, sino que no nos habíais de oír petición tan justa. No lo creo yo, Señor, de vuestra bondad y justicia, que sois justo juez y no como los jueces del mundo, que como son hijos de Adán y, en fin, todos varones no hay virtud de mujer que no tengan por sospechosa. Sí, que algún día ha de haber, Rey mío, que se conozcan todos. No hablo por mí, que ya tiene conocido el mundo mi ruindad y yo holgado que sea pública; sino porque veo los tiempos de manera que no es razón desechar ánimos virtuosos y fuertes, aunque sean de mujeres [Fin de renglones censurados].”

The subversion of Teresa's thought is astonishing, despite the fact that she presented it as a discourse aimed at encouraging her nuns's prayers. The problematic nature of these lines did not go unnoticed for her confessor, who saw in them the potential for trouble with religious authorities. Teresa did not stop at considering men and women as spiritual equals (*tanto amor*), but she even rendered women's faith as superior (*más fe*). And while Teresa praised divine justice, she explicitly contrasted it with the unfairness of the judges of this world, all of them men who mistrust women. Teresa openly disavowed the attitude of these suspecting men who seemed to find evil even in women's virtues. The fragment is both a vindication of women's spirituality, and a condemnation of those who considered women unworthy. Unlike men, Teresa remarked, Christ favored women. These quoted lines likely triggered alarms regarding Teresa's orthodoxy, which explains the double censoring marks, traced by both her confessor and herself. Ultimately, this censored fragment reveals the remarkable awareness Teresa had of the prevalent misogyny of her time.

Weber has convincingly argued that Teresa's adoption of this misogynistic discourse fostered by the Counterreformation was a rhetorical strategy that helped her gain the trust of Catholic Church officials and distance herself from heretics, particularly *alumbrados* (*Rhetoric* 33-35).⁶¹ Weber's analysis concludes by establishing the naïveté of taking at face value the remarks Teresa made of women's inferiority, and it questions the utility of characterizing Teresa's style as either feminine or vulgar, without a recognition of the strategic devices she employed.⁶² However, Teresa's insistence on repeating these misogynistic ideas while simultaneously

⁶¹ For scholarship on *alumbrados*, see: Alistair Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth-Century Spain*; Antonio Márquez, *Los alumbrados: orígenes y filosofía*; Álvaro Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados*; John E. Longhurst, "Alumbrados, erasmistas y luteranos en el proceso de Juan de Vergara;" and Angela Selke, "El iluminismo de los conversos y la Inquisición." On Teresa viewed by her contemporaries as an *alumbrada* see Weber's *Rhetoric*, especially chapter 1.

⁶² These categorizations of Teresa's writing style have been repeated for decades by many Teresianists. See, among others: Edgar Allison Peers, "Saint Teresa's Style: A Tentative Appraisal;" Rafael Lapesa, *Historia de la lengua española*; Ramón Menéndez Pidal's chapter on "El estilo de Santa Teresa" in *La lengua de Cristóbal Colón y otros estudios sobre el siglo XVI*; and Américo Castro, *Teresa la Santa y otros ensayos*.

defending women raises the question of her sincerity. Was she using these affirmations that put women down solely as a rhetorical strategy? Or was she, at least to an extent, convinced of the idea, common in her time, of women's inferiority? Antonio Pérez-Romero, for instance, has affirmed that her misogynistic statements were "only lip service formulas, strategies that she used to protect herself and her plans to dignify women" (159). But this is problematic, because it would imply that Teresa was actively deceiving her confessors and male readers every time she adopted belittling terms to describe women. Deception, once again, lies at the very core of this issue.

Teresa also believed that women were more prone to mystical raptures and visions than men. She justified this opinion as an echo of that of Peter of Alcántara, her close friend and a respected religious figure. Teresa affirmed that she believed, as Alcántara did, that women not only received more spiritual gifts from God than men, but also that they profited more from such visions and raptures than men did (*Life* 40.8). Teresa did not go into detail, nor did she attempt an explanation as to why she believed these things. But she clearly suggested that Alcántara, along with other revered men, interpreted God's graces as a sign of favorability to women. Whatever the reasons God had for granting more spiritual gifts to women than men, they were all evidence of women's worthiness. Nevertheless, this defense of visionary women became less adamant over time. In *The Way of Perfection* (1566), a book addressed to her nuns as a way to teach them how to pray, Teresa consistently tried to diminish the importance of visions and raptures. Instead, she insisted that the nuns in her reformed convents should focus on prayer, obedience to confessors, and charity. During her later years, Teresa started to have doubts about the origin of the visions that some of her nuns were claiming to experience. In many cases, just as some of her confessors had done with her, Teresa attributed such visions to the frail and feverish imaginations of the

visionary nuns. Women were, after all, weak and unlearned, and had trouble in distinguishing the origin of their raptures:

I want to warn you about a danger . . . in which I have seen people of prayer fall, *for women, especially, as we are more frail*, what I will say is more timely. What happens is that some, on account of their penances, prayers, and vigils, and at times even without these, have a frail complexion; in receiving any spiritual gift, their nature subjects them, and whenever they feel an interior joy along with exterior frailty . . . they let themselves be entranced. And the more they lose themselves, the more entranced they become, their nature becomes weaker, and in their minds they think is enrapture, but I call it foolishness, for it is nothing but a waste of time and health (there was a person that was in this state for eight hours), they are not senseless, nor are they feeling anything from God. This said person was cured with proper sleep and diet, and less penance, because there was someone who understood what was happening, as *she had unintentionally deceived her confessor, other people, and herself*. I think the devil was interfering to try to benefit, and he was starting to benefit (*Castle* 4.3.11)⁶³

Just as she had avowed the spiritual equality of men and women, Teresa admitted the weakness of female nature. This weakness, exacerbated by extreme penance, created a fertile ground for deception. The feverishness of the female imagination, debilitated by fasting and mortification, along with the feelings that accompany deep prayer, made women more prone to being deceived by the devil, according to Teresa's logic. This idea of women's propensity to being deceived is echoed in *The Interior Castle* in 6.4.2 and 6.4.9. In this last passage, Teresa declared that if a soul is confused by what it understands during rapture, it is not truly a rapture, but rather an illusion emanated from women's characteristic weakness.⁶⁴ Interestingly, although Teresa

⁶³ "De un peligro os quiero avisar . . . en que he visto caer a personas de oración, *en especial mujeres, que como somos más flacas*, ha más lugar para lo que voy a decir. Y es que algunas, de la mucha penitencia y oración y vigiliass y aun sin esto, sonse flacas de complexión; en teniendo algún regalo, sujétales el natural y, como sienten contento alguno interior y caimiento en lo exterior y una flaqueza . . . parécenles que es lo uno como lo otro y déjanse embebecer. Y mientras más se dejan, se embebecen más, porque se enflaquece más el natural, y *en su seso les parece arrobamiento; y llámole yo abobamiento*, que no es otra cosa más de estar perdiendo tiempo allí y gastando su salud (a una persona le acaecía estar ocho horas), que ni están sin sentido, ni sienten cosa de Dios. Con dormir y comer y no hacer tanta penitencia, se le quitó a esta persona, porque hubo quien la entendiese, que *a su confesor traía engañado y a otras personas y a sí misma, que ella no quería engañar*. Bien creo que haría el demonio alguna diligencia para sacar alguna ganancia, y no comenzaba a sacar poca."

⁶⁴ "Yo tengo para mí que si algunas veces no entiende de estos secretos, en los arrobamientos, el alma a quien los ha dado Dios, que *no son arrobamientos, sino alguna flaqueza natural, que puede ser a personas de flaca complexión, como somos las mujeres*, con alguna fuerza de espíritu sobrepujar al natural y quedarse así embebidas."

questioned the divine origin of the experiences reported by her nuns, she did not condemn them for actively trying to deceive others. She argued instead that they were deceived themselves, either by the devil or their own imaginations. Even in the cases in which the devil intervened, Teresa exculpated the victims for their frailty. By the time she completed her last written work, *The Book of Foundations* (1580), she explicitly acknowledged that some women deceived themselves involuntarily, and as such, they were not to be blamed (4.2).

This idea of the susceptibility of women to be deceived because of their weakness had previously been disseminated by fourteenth-century theologian Jean Gerson (1363-1429).⁶⁵ He had explained that “physiological and psychological disorders can approximate true revelations,” because the mind of those who were ill or depressed could “simulate genuine spiritual gifts” (Keitt, 60). From this derived the notion that immoderate fasting and penance could produce hallucinations that could easily be mistaken for God’s gifts. It was then the job of trained theologians and confessors to determine true visions from imagined ones, and Gerson provided clues that could guide religious men to discern the nature of their penitents’ experiences. Teresa fully subscribed to these ideas, but what she never conceded, and in fact she forcefully rejected, was the suspicion that her visionary nuns were deliberate deceivers. And while Teresa admitted the possibility for all kinds of people, particularly nuns, of being deceived by their weak bodies or imaginations, she did not excuse the unfairness with which visionary women were judged.

In Teresa’s view, there was no need for the permanent suspicion of visionary women. Typically, women who experienced raptures were submitted to continued questioning, accusations, and harassment, as theologians tried to determine the authenticity of their raptures. Teresa resented

⁶⁵ Jean Gerson was a prominent French theologian whose work was consulted as a guide for confessors who dealt with visionary penitents, particularly women. Several of Teresa’s accusers reference Gerson’s work in their accusatory documents addressed to the Inquisition. I discuss Gerson and the discernment of spirits in chapter 1.

the persecutions to which she was subjected, and the difficulty of consolidating authority as a visionary woman. In chapter 20 of *The Book of Her Life*, she made this resentment extensive to all visionary women: “A thousand persecutions rain onto her head, they hold her as not humble and think that one who should be learning wants to teach, especially if she is a woman. If so they condemn her, and rightly so, because they don’t know what her motivation is, and she cannot suffer to be unable to undeceive those whom she loves and wants to see free from the prison of this life” (20.25).⁶⁶ Teresa skillfully combined the portrayal of a just condemnation by theologians with the description of a fierce and unjust persecution. In a remarkable use of her rhetorical strategies, Teresa exculpated the judges for not knowing the intentions of the visionary, who wanted nothing but to help others gain salvation. It is also noteworthy how deception enters into play in this quoted passage. To “undeceive” (*desengañar*) seems to have here the classic Teresian meaning of turning to God, but in the passage, it is the visionary that is undeceived, and whose quest is to bring to others the light of truth. It is easy to infer, then, that the deceived ones would be those who persecute the visionary, although they are not to blame either, because they do not know that the visionary speaks the truth.

Teresa did recognize that women were more susceptible of being deceived by the devil, precisely because of their weakness, but under no circumstance did this imply that women were deceivers. Teresa explained deception as the result of women’s physical or intellectual frailty, and their lack of theological training, but not as a result of their inferiority or their alleged wicked nature. Teresa never conceded to the idea of women as more evil or as spiritually inferior than men. Quite to the contrary, as we have seen, she defended their superior faith, and their greater

⁶⁶ “Lluévenle en la cabeza mil persecuciones: tiénenla por poco humilde y que quiere enseñar a de quien había de depender; en especial si es mujer, aquí es el condenar -y con razón-, porque no saben el ímpetu que la mueve . . . no puede sufrir no desengañar a los que quiere bien y desea ver sueltos de esta cárcel de esta vida.”

capacity and disposition to receive God's favors. In this sense, Teresa did not fully embrace the misogynistic discourse of her time, but she adopted only a part of it. She embraced the idea of female frailty because it allowed her to control the visionary experiences that were happening inside her reformed convents, so that they would not endanger her religious reform.

In the extraordinary censored passage of *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa strongly contested many of the prejudices against women commonly held in sixteenth-century Spain. Teresa advocated for women's access to mental prayer, and even for a more fair treatment of their spiritual experiences. She didn't hesitate to reproach confessors and theologians whom she considered were causing more harm than good when judging their visionary penitents too harshly. However, it would be a stretch to sustain, as Pérez-Romero, that Teresa's adoption of the misogynistic discourse of her time was "only lip service" (159). We cannot ignore Teresa's idea of an inherent weakness in female nature, and we would be wrong to attribute to Teresa modern attitudes that she simply could not have. She was, after all, a woman of her time. The sincerity of Teresa's denouncements of over-suspecting confessors and of her appreciations of women's spiritual, physical, and intellectual nature, cannot be questioned. Rather, her sincerity regarding these matters should be put into context, analyzed, discussed and understood.

Deception and Visions

The discourse on the discernment of spirits, markedly influenced by Jean Gerson's work, established certain parameters designed to help theologians determine the legitimacy of their penitents' visions. However, as Keitt has noticed, these parameters were not clear, and in fact the boundaries between what was divine, diabolic, physical or intellectual were not only blurry, but also constantly tested (64). What is more, the categories established in the discourse of the discernment of spirits were susceptible of becoming a tool used by visionary women in the defense

of their visions. In other words, visionaries could come to be aware of the guidelines established by Gerson to determine the legitimacy of visionary penitents, and often used them to convince confessors of the authenticity of their supernatural experiences. Teresa provides a great example of this. She meticulously adhered to Gerson's instructions in crucial matters, some of them listed by Keitt, such as the submission of visionary women to their male superiors; the demonization or naturalization of raptures and visions; and the correspondence of revelations to the Church's doctrine (65). In *The Book of Her Life* we find numerous examples of all of the above. By the time she completed this work, Teresa had found compelling arguments that helped her determine and defend the legitimacy of her visions, and she even managed to gain the support of some of her confessors. She only wrote about doubts on the origin of her visions retrospectively, from the perspective of someone who had overcome past fears.

In writing about her visions, Teresa detailed the doubts that plagued her, the torment of fearing she could have been deceived by the devil. She also thoroughly documented her need for learned theologians who could help her understand what was happening and what the meaning of the visions was. Resorting to her confessors with the account of her spiritual experiences had the paradoxical effect of relieving her from the responsibility to determine the legitimacy of her visions, while also becoming a potential target for accusations of deception. And Teresa understood the dangers of being a visionary woman in her time. In all likelihood, she knew about the cases of *alumbradas*, and of women who later turned out to be notorious deceivers, such as Magdalena de la Cruz and María de la Visitación.⁶⁷ Teresa was aware of the cases of women who had been accused to the Inquisition for visions that were deemed as either false or demonic, and,

⁶⁷ Both of them are referenced in chapter 1.

perhaps to convince her male superiors of her innocence, or perhaps too with sincerity, she confessed her deep fear of being deceived by the devil:

His Majesty began to give me regularly the prayer of quiet, and often the prayer of union, which lasted for a long time. Since in these times there had been cases of women who had been tricked by the devil with illusions and deceptions, I began to fear. The delight and the sweetness which I felt were so great, and I could not help but to feel them, although I could see in myself, on the other hand, a deep reassurance that this was of God, especially when I was in prayer, and I found myself feeling better and with greater strength. But as soon as I got distracted, I would fear again and begin to wonder if it was the devil who, deceiving me into thinking that it was a good thing, wanted to suspend my understanding to dispossess me of mental prayer (*Life* 23.2)⁶⁸

While the visions and raptures offered her some reassurance, the feeling that perhaps these experiences were coming from God, she still harbored a fearful doubt. Teresa was aware of the multiple cases of fraudulent visionaries, and she knew that her visions could put her in a difficult position. This fear of being deceived was crucial in determining the way in which Teresa tried to find a solution for deception. She described how, as the visions and raptures grew in frequency and intensity, she felt the need to turn to her confessors in search for explanations. And it couldn't have been an easy decision to make. In fact, Teresa did not find support or consolation in her confessor at the time, Father Gaspar Daza, nor on her friend Francisco de Salcedo, a layman who had introduced her to Daza. Salcedo considered Teresa unworthy of the divine gifts she claimed to receive (*Life* 23.11-14). Instead, Teresa found a relatable experience written in *Subida del Monte Sión* by Bernardino de Laredo. According to her account, the Carmelite even underlined the parts of the book that she related to, and showed her reading to both Daza and Salcedo, not without

⁶⁸ "Comenzó Su Majestad a darme muy ordinario oración de quietud, y muchas veces de unión, que duraba mucho rato. Yo, como en estos tiempos habían acaecido grandes ilusiones en mujeres y engaños que las había hecho el demonio, comencé a temer, como era tan grande el deleite y suavidad que sentía, y muchas veces sin poderlo excusar, puesto que veía en mí por otra parte una grandísima seguridad que era Dios, en especial cuando estaba en la oración, y veía que quedaba de allí muy mejorada y con más fortaleza; mas en distrayéndome un poco, tornaba a temer y a pensar si quería el demonio, haciéndome entender que era bueno, suspender el entendimiento para quitarme la oración mental"

asserting her willingness to give up her way of prayer at their command. After consulting Teresa's case with other priests (and she bitterly reproached the publication of her case in *Life* 23.13), Father Daza determined that Teresa was being deceived by the devil (*Life* 23.11).

Amidst the commotion that this terrible sentence caused in Teresa, she managed to forge two different arguments that questioned her confessor's pronouncement, and that opened the possibility of a divine origin for the visions: The first one was her own moral behavior. Underneath the discourse of doubt, Teresa established a clear connection between her raptures and her own moral and virtuous behavior: "I thought to myself that I could only seek to have a clear conscience and avoid every occasion, even of venial sin, because, if it was the spirit of God, the benefit was clear; if it was the devil, provided that I sought to keep the Lord happy and to not offend Him, he could do little damage, and would be at a loss" (*Life* 23.5).⁶⁹ For Teresa, a strict adherence to virtue would protect her from the devil's deception, since he would not be able to advance if she resisted temptation. Teresa described how the visions left her with a great love of God, and with a new urge of doing good unto others. She even compared the virtues instilled in her by the raptures to jewels left by God in her arms, and argued that it would not make sense for the devil to try to trick her by making her more virtuous than she was before she had visions (*Life* 28.13). Teresa's logic is flawless. She presented her own moral behavior and her increasing virtue as credentials for the authenticity of her mystical raptures. This also allowed her to attribute all her wretchedness to herself, and all her goodness to God, thus shielding her from accusations of lack of humility and possibly *alumbradismo*.

⁶⁹ "Pensé en mí que no tenía remedio si no procuraba tener limpia conciencia y apartarme de toda ocasión, aunque fuese de pecados veniales, porque, siendo espíritu de Dios, clara estaba la ganancia; si era demonio, procurando yo tener contento a el Señor y no ofenderle, poco daño me podía hacer, antes él quedaría con pérdida."

The second argument she forged to contest Father Daza's conclusion was through a tautological reasoning. Her confessor's opinion that her visions were demonic meant a terrible blow for Teresa, whose worst fears had become a reality when the possibility of deception crystallized in Father Daza's judgment. But the Carmelite resorted again to her books. She found comfort in Saint Paul's claim that God did not allow for those who loved Him to be deceived by the devil (*Life* 23.15).⁷⁰ This was the second time that she found in a book an alternative interpretation for her situation; one that challenged her confessors' verdict. She argued that the visions came with a reassuring feeling, almost a certainty that the experience came from God. And after experiencing the breathtaking power of the supernatural, Teresa could not understand the visions as something other than God's grace. In fact, chapter 29 of *The Book of Her Life*, is a bitter denouncement of her confessors' mandates to make a foul gesture, *dar higas*,⁷¹ to the visions of Christ. She reproached the harshness of her superiors, while she also expressed a radical impossibility to doubt the authenticity of her visions:

For me, it was a great grief to be forced to make the foul gesture at the vision of the Lord, because whenever I saw Him, I could not believe that it was the devil, even if they had cut me to pieces, this was a kind of vast penance to me. So as not to go around continually crossing myself, I would take a cross in my hand. I did this almost always; but the foul gesture I didn't do so often, because it was quite painful. I remembered the insults that the Jews had said to Him, and I asked Him to forgive me, as I did it out of obedience to the one who was in His place, and not to blame me, as this came from one of the ministers that He had placed in His Church. He told me not to worry about it, and that I did the right thing by obeying, but that He would make sure they would learn the truth. When they took away my prayer it seemed to me that He had been upset, and He told me to tell them that this was tyranny. He gave me reasons for me to understand that it was not the devil. (29.6)⁷²

⁷⁰ The passage that Teresa alludes to seems to be 1 Cor 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

⁷¹ In Covarrubias we find the definition for *higa*: it is a form of disparagement that we do by clenching the fist and showing the thumb through the index and middle fingers. See Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*. <http://fondosdigitales.us.es/fondos/libros/765/16/tesoro-de-la-lengua-castellana-o-espanola/> Accessed 24/08/2017.

⁷² "Dábame este dar higas grandísima pena cuando veía esta visión del Señor; porque cuando yo le veía presente, si me hicieran pedazos no pudiera yo creer que era demonio, y así era un género de penitencia grande para mí. Y, por no

Teresa could not conceive the visions to be a trick from the devil, regardless of her confessor's opinion. In this quoted passage, she expressed an extraordinary confidence in the fact that her visions were the product of God. This certainty emerged directly from the power of the experience itself, and from her conviction that God would not allow her to be deceived. Remarkably, Teresa described some of her visions as the manifestation of a truth so overwhelming that she simply could not put it to doubt (*Life* 27.5). But this certainty was at odds with the obedience that the Carmelite owed to her superiors, and she struggled to explain it to her confessor. For Daza, Teresa's visions could have been just the same a trick from the devil. Teresa contended that the divine origin of these kinds of visions was so evident that she would be surprised to know that a person who had them could be deceived. In fact, she added, deception would only be possible if the visionary allowed herself to be deceived. Such was the power of the visions, and the sense of reassurance that they left in the visionary (*Life*, 25.6). In a way, Teresa subtly reclaimed the power to legitimize her visions.

But Teresa knew that this tautological explanation of the divine origin of her visions was not going to suffice; certainly not for those who were already suspicious of her. Consequently, Teresa identified yet another parameter that could help her to determine if her visions were legitimate or not. As we have seen, she assessed the visions by the spiritual and moral effects they generated in the visionary, and then she justified them tautologically. Teresa added that authentic visions should also be in perfect conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the doctrine of the Catholic Church. In this regard, she harmonized perfectly with Gerson's discourse on the

andar tanto santiguándome, tomaba una cruz en la mano. Esto hacía casi siempre; las higas no tan continuo, porque sentía mucho. Acordábame de las injurias que le habían hecho los judíos, y suplicábale me perdonase, pues yo lo hacía por obedecer al que tenía en su lugar, y que no me culpase, pues eran los ministros que Él tenía puestos en su Iglesia. Decíame que no se me diese nada, que bien hacía en obedecer, mas que él haría que se entendiese la verdad. Cuando me quitaban la oración, me pareció se había enojado. Díjome que les dijese que ya aquello era tiranía. Dábame causas para que entendiese que no era demonio.”

discernment of spirits. Teresa affirmed that God would not allow the devil to deceive a faithful soul that strove to be in conformity with everything that the Church commanded, and no amount of visions could make it stray away from ecclesial truth (*Life* 25.13). It is precisely this vindication of the Church as the sole ruler of orthodoxy, along with her constant reassurance of a perfect obedience to her confessor that made it difficult to justify accusations of heresy against Teresa.

But this subjection to ecclesial mandate meant that she could only go so far in her defense of the authenticity of her visions. Again and again throughout Teresa's life (and even after her death), it would be up to theologians to assess the legitimacy of her supernatural experiences. In the cases of visionary women, the role of the confessor or spiritual director was delicate and filled with dangers, as Andrew Keitt has stated, because he "could become a charismatic leader in the style of the *alumbrados*, or merely a deluded champion of a fraudulent visionary, blinded by his own ambition" (103). Teresa always made sure to seek confessors and priests who shared her inclination to mysticism and mental prayer. This explains, for instance, her interest in Jesuit confessors.⁷³ She expressed affinity for them because she had heard of their spiritual exercises and their avowal of mental prayer. And, as Weber has demonstrated, whenever Teresa received contradicting orders from her superiors, she managed to pledge obedience to those whose mandates were aligned with her desires (*Rhetoric* 133). Among the confessors and priests who believed her visions had a divine origin was Father Diego Cetina. This Jesuit was one of the very first priests who refused to think her raptures were demonic. After him came the validation of renowned theologians and ascetics such as Francis Borgia, Peter of Alcántara, and even John of

⁷³ There is extensive scholarship on Teresa's relation with the Society of Jesus. Among some of the most relevant works are the following: Juan Antonio Zugasti, S. J. *Santa Teresa y la Compañía de Jesús. Estudio histórico-crítico*; Manuel Ruiz Jurado, "Santa Teresa y los jesuitas;" Ignacio Iglesias, S. J. "Santa Teresa de Jesús y la espiritualidad ignaciana;" José Gómez Centurión, "El padre Diego de Cetina, primer confesor jesuita de Santa Teresa de Jesús;" Teófanis Egido, "'La principal ayuda que he tenido'. Santa Teresa y los de la Compañía de Jesús;" and Cándido de Dalmases, "Santa Teresa y los jesuitas. Precizando fechas y datos."

Ávila. Some of them became her close friends, mentors, and allies, and opened the way for the prevalence of her image as a holy woman, rather than as a deceiver.

Suspicious increased with the circulation of *The Book of Her Life*, particularly because of her descriptions of spiritual visions. Her confessors and superiors had only two options: they either believed this visionary who carefully established her adherence to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, or they thought of her as a deceiver or as deceived. Teresa posed a challenge to religious authorities because she played along the lines of Gerson's discourse on the discernment of spirits: she argued her moral behavior, the visions themselves, and their conformity to the Catholic doctrine as proof of their legitimacy. Whenever she ran into suspecting theologians and confessors, she simultaneously submitted to their opinion while she continued to defend the authenticity of her visionary experience. She was able to walk into the tension of submitting to their authority while maintaining her conviction that her visions were divine and authentic. It is precisely this paradoxical response from Teresa that raised the question of her sincerity, but it also proved to be remarkably effective in her successful legitimization as a visionary woman.

Deception as Doubt

One of the most effective ways in which Teresa tried to remain distant from those accused of heresy, and particularly of *alumbradismo*, was through her use of a rhetoric of doubt. Unlike the *alumbrados*, who claimed to receive direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit, Teresa appeared to be constantly doubtful of the visions she had, of the spiritual path she followed, and particularly of her form of prayer.⁷⁴ According to her own account, this incapacity to be entirely certain of her

⁷⁴ Teresa may have been aware of the astonishing certainty that Isabel de la Cruz and Pedro Ruiz de Alcaraz, two of the most renowned *alumbrados*, displayed during their inquisitorial trials. Isabel de la Cruz stated that "as long as she retained this love of God she could not be deceived and that she could not err as long as she remained in this love of God and her neighbor." Alcaraz, on the other hand, claimed that "love was so deeply rooted in him that it was impossible for him to misinterpret the Scriptures or to err." Inquisitors considered this attitude as part of the heresy of

mystical experience made her feel the need to turn to *letrados* for guidance (*Life* 23.3-7). This narrative of the insecure visionary nun that sought help from theologians and was willing to obey their mandates made it difficult for the Inquisition to condemn her for heresy. Teresa didn't seem to be deliberately trying to deceive her superiors. As Father Domingo Báñez stated in his censure (*censura*) of Teresa's *Book of Her Life*: "This woman, as her account shows, although she could be deceiving herself in something, she at least is not a deceiver, because she speaks so plainly, about what is good and bad, and with so much desire to understand, that she does not let us doubt of her good intention" (*Life* 230-1)."⁷⁵

Báñez's impression was the result of Teresa's careful elaboration of a rhetoric of doubt. Teresa knew that she did not have the theological knowledge nor the authority to convincingly explain her experiences, and so she declared herself to be ignorant. By casting a light of doubt over her own certainties, Teresa was able to create a less menacing version of the visionary woman, one that was not purposefully trying to deceive her confessors. As I have noted, Teresa's doubt is a radical departure from the overconfidence attributed to Isabel de la Cruz, the famous *alumbrada* who was condemned in 1529. Of Isabel we are told that after five years of imprisonment, she was induced to confess "that *she lacked humility since she was certain that she could not be deceived* and hence came all her effrontery in speaking of the Holy Scripture and teaching it to others, . . . and she confesses that she was in error in committing this act of effrontery, since she was an unlearned woman" (Weber *Rhetoric* 27).⁷⁶ Teresa presented herself as an ignorant woman in the

the Beghards. These extracts from the inquisitorial documents are quoted by Alistair Hamilton, p. 35. For information on *alumbrados* and the Beghards, see Antonio Márquez, *Los alumbrados: orígenes y filosofía*. In contrast, Teresa's doubtful attitude may have contributed to appease the suspicions of some confessors, theologians, and even inquisitors.

⁷⁵ "Esta mujer, a lo que muestra su relación, aunque ella se engañe en algo, a lo menos no es engañadora; porque habla tan llanamente, bueno y malo, y con tanta gana de acertar, que no deja dudar de su buena intención." The *censura* by Father Domingo Báñez may be found at the end of Teresa's *Book of Her Life*. I have given the page numbers here because the chapter and paragraph numeration stops before the *censura*.

⁷⁶ Taken from Longhurst, "La Beata Isabel de la Cruz ante la Inquisición, 1524-1529," quotation 285. Cited in Weber's *Rhetoric*.

same way as the Inquisition had asked of Isabel, but she did it well before she could ever get involved in an inquisitorial trial. In her writings, Teresa crafted an image of herself as an unlearned and doubtful visionary that desperately needed the guidance of her confessors to tell her what to make of her spiritual experiences.

In fact, Father Pedro Ibáñez, one of her confessors, expressed this very consideration in a written report to other theologians during the tumultuous times that surrounded the foundation of Teresa's first reformed convent of San José. In his report, reproduced by Llamas Martínez, Ibáñez echoed the opinion expressed by Father Báñez, and he remarked how Teresa had chosen to communicate her raptures to her confessors. Ibáñez pointed this out as a reason to ease suspicions against Teresa: "Whenever the devil tries to *deceive*, it is his style to advise people to keep silent about what he says; but she was advised to communicate with learned serfs of the Lord, and was told that when she silences something, it is because perhaps she is being *deceived by the devil*" (Llamas 10).⁷⁷ It is important to notice how, to defend the authenticity of Teresa's visions, Ibáñez associated the idea of deception with silence. According to Ibáñez, the devil deceived the visionary by urging her to be silent. And since Teresa had opted for an open communication with her confessors, letting them know every detail about her visions, it was difficult to make the argument that she was trying to deceive them. Moreover, it was hard to regard her with apprehension. Not only did Teresa tell her confessors about her visions, but she also exhorted the nuns in her convents to do the same. She wanted to avoid suspicions that could put in peril her reforming efforts (*Way V*, 39.7).⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Estilo es del demonio, quando pretende *engañar*, avisar que callen lo que les dice; mas a ella le avisan que lo comunique con letrados siervos del Señor, y que quando callare por ventura la *engañará* el demonio."

⁷⁸ *The Way of Perfection* suffered important and numerous editions made by Teresa. Today we have two different versions of this work with significant variations. The extract paraphrased here comes from the Valladolid codex (hence *Way V*), as to differentiate it from the codex in El Escorial (which will be cited as *Way E*).

But the decision of communicating her visions with confessors did not imply that Teresa would be free of suspicious concerns. Paradoxically, by telling her confessors about her visions, Teresa gained a notoriety that put her under the scrutiny of mistrusting authorities. In *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa acknowledged the risks that she underwent by trusting her mystical experiences to her confessors, particularly at the very beginning, when the visions started to happen more frequently and more intensely. She explained the great danger of having confessors who judged as diabolic all kinds of visions, especially if reported by women. She also denounced the carelessness with which her superiors handled the matter and made it public, submitting her to accusations and suspicions from a larger audience, jeopardizing her reputation and even putting her at risk. Nevertheless, she concluded, she still trusted that speaking up was a better alternative than keeping her visions to herself:

The trouble is great, and caution is necessary, especially in the case of women, because our weakness is great, and much evil could come from telling them that it is clearly the devil; instead, the matter should be carefully considered, and they should be led away from the perils that could arise. They should be advised to keep it a secret; and the confessors should also keep the secret.

I speak of this as someone for whom this has been a problem, for some of those with whom I spoke of my prayer did not keep my secret, but they went asking around, and with good intentions they harmed me greatly, for things that should have remained a secret were made public, as these things were not to be known by everyone, and it seemed as if I had made them public myself . . . I am not saying that they revealed what I told them during confession, but as they were persons in whom I confided my fears, so that they would give me some light, it seemed to me that they should have kept my secret. Despite all of this, I never dared to conceal anything from such persons. (23.13)⁷⁹

⁷⁹ “Es grande, cierto, el trabajo que se pasa, y es menester tiento, en especial con mujeres, porque es mucha nuestra flaqueza y podría venir a mucho mal diciéndoles muy claro es demonio; sino mirarlo muy bien, y apartarlas de los peligros que puede haber, y avisarlas en secreto pongan mucho y le tengan ellos, que conviene.

Y en esto hablo como quien le cuesta harto trabajo no le tener algunas personas con quien he tratado mi oración, sino preguntando unos y otros, por bien me han hecho harto daño, que se han divulgado cosas que estuvieran bien secretas –pues no son para todos– y parecía las publicaba yo . . . No digo que decían lo que trataba con ellos en confesión; mas, como eran personas a quien yo daba cuenta por mis temores para que me diesen luz, parecíame a mí habían de callar. Con todo, nunca osaba callar cosa a personas semejantes.”

This argument, topped off with her own decision to share with confessors her spiritual experiences, is a grim denunciation of the levity and imprudence of some learned men. Although Teresa was perfectly aware of the dangers derived from disclosing her visionary activity with her superiors, she still chose this alternative over silence because silence, she recognized, entailed disobedience, and thus, offending God and the possibility of deception. Teresa did not refrain from criticizing the role of confessors regarding their visionary penitents, and she even reproached their careless behavior. She exhorted her confessors not to jump to conclusions, but to let time reveal what the best course of action was, regarding a visionary penitent, so as not to cause more harm than good. Teresa went as far as to advise her confessor, Father García de Toledo, not to be so sure of himself. She urged him to learn to use doubt as a helpful caution against deception, and she used her own extensive experience to justify her cautionary remarks (*Life* 31.19).

Teresa wrote about the need to be permanently cautious and fearful of deception in all of her major works. Talking about visions, she warned her nuns that “it is always a good thing to walk with some fear” (*Castle* 6.3.17). In *The Way of Perfection* she admonished that, for as long as we live, we may always have the need for both fear and love of God, and we may never be entirely certain that we are on the right path (41.9). In a way, Teresa transformed doubt into a powerful tool for combatting deception, and paradoxically, into the reassurance of doing what was right. By asserting the impossibility of ever being sure of herself, Teresa was able to stand apart from the certainty that *alumbrados* expressed while trialed by inquisitors. Doubt justified her need to seek advice and guidance from theologians, and consequently, it put her on the side of the Church’s orthodoxy, and it reaffirmed her acceptance of the subordinate role she had in ecclesial hierarchy.

For Teresa, doubt became a natural outcome of supernatural visions and a sign that the visionary stayed within the limits of orthodoxy. But even doubt had its limits. Just as she did with other concepts (including humility and obedience), Teresa differentiated between true and false doubt.⁸⁰ True doubt was a compass that guided the mystic to the goal of union with God, and kept her within the limits of the Catholic Church's doctrine. False doubt, on the other hand, became an obstacle that rendered faith impossible and hindered any progress on the path to God. The devil as well as human frailty were responsible for this second kind of doubt, which targeted God's mercy and made the soul incapable of doing any good. Its symptoms included doubt on God's benevolence, and the idea that there was no true good in one's own soul (*Way V* 39.1).

Teresa made a deliberate use of language around doubt. She used it to express her submission to learned men, whose authority she did not put into question, even though she did not spare them criticism in different parts of her work. But doubt served many other purposes for Teresa. As a rhetorical strategy, it enabled her to generate a discourse that was both in form and content essentially different from that of *alumbrados*. Doubt turned Teresa into a less threatening version of the visionary woman in the eyes of theologians and religious authorities, and it allowed her to embrace the subordinate role of nun before her male superiors. Doubt also became a powerful tool to fight the possibility of deception. Through doubt Teresa felt less susceptible to err in her judgment of the visions and raptures that she and other nuns were experiencing. To an extent, doubt legitimized the divine origin of such visions, and because of her explicit declaration of this doubt, she could hardly be considered a deceiver. Her fear of deception moved Teresa to demand doubt, not only from herself, but also from her nuns, and even her confessors. For Teresa,

⁸⁰ Weber discusses this rhetorical strategy used by Teresa: "If she had previously dismantled monolithic, binding concepts such as 'humility' and 'obedience' into 'true' and 'false' components, she now submits 'ecstasy' and 'union' to the same procedure" (*Rhetoric* 138).

doubt functioned as a natural frontier between orthodoxy and heresy, between deception and reasonable certainty. Paradoxically, Teresa could only find the confidence of being in the right path to God by walking in the light of doubt.

Deception as Knowledge

In chapter 5 of *The Book of Her Life*, we find out that in her early twenties Teresa suffered a paroxysm, and for almost four days she remained unconscious. Her family and friends thought she would inevitably die. In retrospect, Teresa described her fear of having been so close to death without a clean conscience and in great peril of eternal damnation. She also accused some of her confessors for having diminished the gravity of the sins she had committed. Although unknowingly, she claimed, they had deceived her and in doing so, they had jeopardized her salvation. As soon as she recovered, Teresa demanded to speak to a confessor, and from this point onwards, her whole attitude towards sin and confession would be forever changed (5.11-12). This episode is important because it illustrates Teresa's idea of deception as the result of insufficient knowledge. In the passage, deception is associated to those confessors who had misled Teresa. She acknowledged their good intentions, and argued that the confusion in which they put her stemmed from their lack of knowledge.

As a woman of her time, Teresa had no formal training in theology or Latin, and as a nun, her position was determined by submission to the authority of her confessors, with whom relations were not always smooth. Some of them looked with suspicion on her visions, while others accused her of contravening Pauline silence with her pretensions of teaching. Some others, however, were her allies and even became practitioners of her way of mental prayer.⁸¹ Ultimately, Teresa

⁸¹ See note 4.

depended on her confessors to gain access to theological knowledge or *letras*, as she called it. Knowledge proved essential to Teresa because it served as a compass on her spiritual development, by helping her to differentiate between sin and virtue, good and bad, truth from falsehood. In addition, theological knowledge became a source of conflict, and at times even led to a power struggle with authority figures, especially when their *letras* contravened her purposes.⁸² Her dependence on trained theologians reached its peak and became painfully evident with the 1559 Valdés Index prohibition of the circulation of spiritual treatises by mystics such as Bernardino de Laredo and Francisco de Osuna.⁸³ Teresa bitterly recalled this prohibition, which forced her to give away books that were of comfort and guidance for her (*Life* 26.6). The dependence on *letrados* increased, and with it, the risk of being unintentionally deceived.

Teresa feared the dangers that could bring very credulous or not well-trained confessors. Perhaps this is why, throughout her writings, she claimed to have sought the most knowledgeable confessors, with the hopes that they would have the tools to better guide her. Hispanist Karen Hollis has remarked that Teresa “consistently showed a preference for men of very scholarly orders –Dominicans and Jesuits, who enjoyed a particularly intimate connection with the written word” (32). Moreover, Teresa established a clear connection between mediocre confessors who were not truly erudite and deception. In chapter 5 of *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa contrasted well-trained theologians with confessors whose knowledge was feeble. This last group, according to her own words, led her to a deceptive path: “And a good *letrado* never deceived me. The other ones did not want to deceive me either, but they did not know any better. I thought they did, and that I was

⁸² A good example of theologians’ knowledge hindering Teresa’s mystical experiences is, for instance, her ironic reproach of the Inquisition’s decision to prohibit spiritual treatises. The passage, paradoxically enough, was censored by one of Teresa’s confessors. It read: “Do well, my daughters, for they will not take away from you the Paternoster and the Hail Mary” (*Way* V 21.8).

⁸³ For more information on Teresa’s readings, see Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Lecturas y maestros de Santa Teresa*.

obliged to believe them” (5.3).⁸⁴ In this statement, Teresa simultaneously exculpated and reproached her confessors for misleading her. She criticized the lack of rigorous training of some of them, but she recognized that their intentions were good. Teresa also conceded that she thought it was her obligation to believe them. Her phrasing suggests that she had come to consider herself as dismissed from believing confessors who deceived or misled her. Furthermore, she concluded with a concerning description of the spread of deception, which points to the confessors themselves as the root of it: “I think that God, for my sins, allowed these confessors to deceive themselves and to deceive me. I deceived many others by telling them the same thing that they had told me” (*Life* 5.3).⁸⁵

It is important to notice that the term *engaño* appears five times in less than 10 lines in the passage previously quoted. Teresa’s insistence cannot be overlooked. For her, depending on mediocre theologians implied the potential for a very grave and dangerous kind of deception that could endanger the one goal of the mystic: that of union with God. Inasmuch as *letrados* were reliable guides that led her to God, Teresa was not only willing to submit to them, but she even expressed her admiration for their knowledge (*Castle* 5.1.7 and *Life* 13.17). However, Teresa’s relation with *letrados* was always equivocal, and it did not stop at an unquestionable admiration for their erudition. At times, very knowledgeable *letrados* became her persecutors, and in various occasions she accused them of not understanding the mystical experience, and therefore of not being capable of fairly judging her raptures.⁸⁶ Alison Weber has described the tension of Teresa’s ambivalent attitude toward *letrados* arguing that she “repeatedly acknowledged her dependence

⁸⁴ “Y buen letrado nunca me engañó. Estotros tampoco me debían de querer engañar, sino no sabían más. Yo pensaba que sí, y que no era obligada a más de creerlos.”

⁸⁵ “Creo permitió Dios por mis pecados ellos se engañasen y me engañasen a mí. Yo engañé a otras hartas con decirles lo mismo que a mí me habían dicho.”

⁸⁶ *Alumbrados* shared Teresa’s criticism of theologians’ incapacity to understand the visionary experience and mental prayer. This coincidence certainly did not help her cause. See Álvaro Huerga. *Predicadores, alumbrados e Inquisición en el siglo XVI*, especially page 80.

on the guidance or correction of the educated clergy or *letrados*, while maintaining that those who had not practiced mental prayer were incapable of judging its orthodoxy . . . she avowed her obedience to hierarchical authority but placed the authority of her inner revelations above that of the Church” (*Rhetoric* 35).

The conflict in Teresa’s relation with *letrados* emerged when they either questioned, condemned or hindered her visionary experiences. For Teresa, confessors who relied exclusively on theological knowledge could not understand spiritual visions and caused a great deal of trouble for those who had them. Ideally, it seems, Teresa expected confessors to have some level of experience with mental prayer and even spiritual visions, so that they could communicate with their penitents from the perspective of a shared or at least relatable experience. But quite possibly, this kind of sincere and open communication was a rare happening, as Teresa consistently accused some confessors of being unfair judges who caused great pain to their visionary penitents. Teresa even claimed that, in a life full of adversity, her struggle with contradicting confessors was one of the greatest challenges she ever had to face (*Life* 28.18). It is precisely because of this problematic tension between theological knowledge and mental prayer that Teresa suggested a distinction between *espirituales* and *letrados*.

This differentiation is not clearly established, as Teresa never provided a definition. But she made numerous references to *personas espirituales* (spiritual persons) at times also called *contemplativos* (contemplatives), a group that was certainly separate from that of *letrados*. This group was predominantly defined by a lifestyle of prayer and devotion rather than by theological knowledge. Just like Teresa, *espirituales* were also acquainted with the experience of the divine, and perhaps even with visionary activity. And it is possible that an *espiritual* may also happen to be a *letrado*, which would be an ideal combination of scholarly knowledge and spiritual practice.

Espirituales, whether they were *letrados* or not, did not condemn mental prayer or visions, and some of them even had experienced raptures themselves. Their relation with *letrados* was ambiguous as at times, theologians were highly suspicious of mental prayer and visionaries. Teresa argued that learned men could use their theological knowledge to assess the legitimacy of visions and raptures. But her assertion that demons feared humble and virtuous knowledge was nothing other than a masterful use of her rhetorical strategies. Undisputedly, Teresa's presentation of *letras* as both the legitimate instrument to appraise the validity of visions and as a weapon against demons, is an attempt to turn hostile *letrados* into potential allies:

And do not be deceived in saying that learned men not given to prayer are not adequate for those who pray. I have known many, because for some years I have sought them with great need of them, and I have always been their friend. For though some of them have no experience, they do not loathe the spirit, nor do they ignore it, because in the Holy Scripture, which they know, they always find the truths of good spirit. I am certain that a person of prayer who deals with learned men, unless she wants to be deceived, the devil will never deceive her with illusions, for I believe that evil spirits are exceedingly afraid of humble and virtuous *letras*. (*Life* 13.18)⁸⁷

Franciscan friar Peter of Alcántara is arguably the best example of what Teresa calls *espirituales*. She described him as a person with a thick spirit (*Life* 27.16). She recounted how, when she first met him, she felt relief as he expressed his understanding of her experiences (*Life* 30.4). Alcántara had a long conversation with Teresa, in which she told him all about her visions. He believed in the authenticity of Teresa's experiences, and he tried to both warn her about and protect her from suspicions and accusations of heresy. Alcántara was in a position of power: he was a prestigious theologian, but also a renowned ascetic whose penance generated admiration

⁸⁷ "Y no se engañe con decir que letrados sin oración no son para quien la tiene (yo he tratado hartos, porque de unos años acá lo he más procurado con la mayor necesidad, y siempre fui amiga de ellos), que aunque algunos no tienen experiencia, no aborrecen a el espíritu ni le ignoran; porque en la Sagrada Escritura que tratan, siempre hallan las verdades del buen espíritu. Tengo para mí que persona de oración que trate con letrados, si ella no se quiere engañar, no la engañará el demonio con ilusiones, porque creo temen en gran manera las letras humildes y virtuosas."

throughout Spain. He was also a man. Alcántara tried to smooth Teresa's path by speaking to her confessor and superiors, assuring them of the divine origin of her visions and raptures. In Teresa's account, he felt deeply sorry for her, and concurred with her perception of persecution by *letrados* as being one of the harshest trials that an *espiritual* had to endure (*Life* 30.6).

However, Alcántara was by no means the only *espiritual* that Teresa consulted with. It seems like Father Rodrigo Álvarez, one of the *calificadores* of the Inquisition examined both orally and in written Teresa's account of her visions and revelations (Llamas 108-9). The resulting document has been published with different names, and is one of the many papers that Teresa left unclassified. The text appears to be an explanation of her spiritual experiences so that inquisitors could assess their orthodoxy.⁸⁸ Teresa described her fears as she started to receive her visions, and claimed to have sought for explanations among *espirituales* from the Society of Jesus, including Father Francisco de Borja. She masterfully argued that, since she wanted only to prove the conformity of her visions with the Holy Scriptures, she preferred to consult with renowned theologians, whether or not they practiced mental prayer. She insisted that she was consoled and reassured by thinking the knowledge of *letrados espirituales* would prevent her from being deceived (*Cuentas de conciencia* 53.2-3).

Espirituales represented an alternative for Teresa's dilemma with *letrados*. This dilemma turned the visionary into the object of deception when theologians were mediocre, and of persecution when they were uncompromising. *Espirituales* offered Teresa the needed reassurance against deception through their knowledge, and protection against accusations through their own spiritual experience. Because Teresa procured *espirituales* that were also prominent theologians, she could feel sure of their endorsement of her spiritual experiences. In this way, they provided

⁸⁸ In the complete works (*Obras Completas*) edited by Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, this document corresponds to number 53 of *Cuentas de conciencia*. In other works it is classified as number 4 of *Relaciones*.

her with a credible shield against the possibility of self-deception, and against accusations of being a deceiver. These *espirituales-letrados* also served as a reminder that knowledge by itself was not a reliable path to God. According to Teresa's reasoning, mental prayer and the experience of the divine were also required, in order to keep the danger of deception at bay. Hollis has explained that, as Teresa gained experience in mental prayer, she also acquired a spiritual authority that sometimes had the potential to prevail over that of her confessors. As Teresa redefined scholarly knowledge as inadequate and insufficient to know God, she vindicated the authenticity of her spiritual experiences and the need for spiritual practices such as mental prayer (36).

Knowledge, as Teresa understood it, was an important guide that helped believers differentiate between good and bad, and virtue and sin. But it fell short as an instrument to get closer to God. Mental prayer was necessary to gain experience of the graces conceded by God. *Letras* could become an obstacle if they were not "virtuous and humble," and otherwise they would be of no help to achieve union with the divine. There is also a subtle implication here that not all *letrados* were humble, but Teresa could not afford to make this affirmation explicit. As Weber has pointed out, it is not unlike Teresa to establish a differentiation between true and false knowledge, just like she did with other virtues, such as humility, obedience, and even with doubt. In her request for humble *letras*, however, Teresa encountered a trap, given that she was marshalling humility while being by a woman, a visionary, and a descendant of *conversos* in the midst of the Spanish Counterreformation.

Deception as Humility

As I have explained in the previous chapter, Jean Gerson has been generally credited with having written the most influential tract on the discernment of spirits in the early fifteenth century. In his first tract, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, Gerson reaffirmed the central

role of humility in the face of visionary activity: “The ‘weight’ of humility is necessary in order to guard against spiritual ambition. Thus, anyone who boasts of revelations, actively pursuing them out of vain curiosity or in order to establish a reputation for sanctity, should immediately be held in suspicion” (Keitt 58). The humility of visionaries had been one of the key variables in the method of the discernment of spirits, as Gerson emphatically argued that humility was to be an expected trait of legitimate visionaries. He also defended the idea that women were more prone to being deceived by the devil, an idea that we see echoed in Teresa. According to Keitt’s analysis, Gerson worried that the female nature, which he associated with sensuousness, chattiness, and curiosity, could wreak havoc in the spiritual realm (60). These preconceptions against women remained unchanged during Teresa’s time. Not only she repeated these claims, but she was also keenly aware of how the discourse on the discernment of spirits affected her own spiritual experience. She knew that for those who suspected her of being a fraud there were several reasons for alarm: she raised her voice to teach, contradicted the Pauline mandate of women remaining silent, and explained her visions and mystical experiences as gifts from God. This is precisely why her use of rhetorical strategies seems so deliberate, and why humility plays such an important role in validating her spiritual experiences.

One of the ways in which Teresa addressed the problem of the humility expected from a visionary was through the differentiation between true and false humility. Alison Weber has brought light to the fact that this division between true and false forms of a virtue is a recurrent strategy employed by Teresa. Weber has explained that, through this distinction, Teresa was able to blame her abandonment of prayer on her false humility, which she explained as a trick by the devil (*Rhetoric* 72). In chapter 7 of *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa recounted how, shortly after recovering from her paroxysm, she began to fall again into a world of vanities. As she felt more

and more distant from God, she fell away from prayer, and convinced herself that to try to pray while living in sin would be lacking humility. For the mature Teresa, this argument was wrong. The young Teresa was merely using humility as an excuse to stay away from prayer. This false humility was nothing but a deceitful trap that kept her from developing a more intimate relation with God. Such a complex conclusion, the result of a careful weaving around the concept of humility, could not be reached without appealing to the idea of deception. Teresa used precisely this term to defend her fear of erroneous humility: “This was the most terrible deception that the devil could do to me, under the disguise of humility, that I feared to practice prayer” (7.1).⁸⁹

Humility must be false if its consequence was to hinder her way to union with God. In this sense, Teresa wrote that she often felt unworthy of the gifts she received while in prayer, and this sense of unworthiness was such that it almost entirely pulled her away from her practice of prayer (*Life* 19.10). She regarded herself as a wretched person, and the mere thought of the graces she could receive led her to abstain from prayer. Teresa named this attitude “arrogant humility” (*humildad soberbia*), and decidedly identified it as a deceptive trick from the devil. Deception then served the purpose of reorienting the meaning of humility for Teresa, as she established a clear division between false and true humility (*Life* 30.9). The former was an obstacle in the final goal of union with God; the latter was the result of knowing God’s mercy. If false humility led to going astray on the way to God, true humility led to the acceptance that visions were undeserved gifts from God. In this way, the distinction between false and true humility also responded to accusations of arrogance made by theologians, and to critics that suggested her unworthiness as recipient of God’s graces.

⁸⁹ “Este fue el más terrible engaño que el demonio me podía hacer debajo de parecer humildad, que comencé a temer de tener oración.”

The effects of true and false humility were entirely different too, according to Teresa. In *The Way of Perfection*, she took the time to list the effects that derived from each. While the outcome of false humility was a feeling of distress (*turbación*), agitation (*alboroto*), and confusion, true humility had an appeasing effect. The devil tempted practitioners of mental prayer by making them think they were so wretched that they did not deserve God's grace. Teresa warned her nuns that, thoughts that led them to mistrust God were nothing but the devil's deception (*Way V 39.2*). Teresa thus indirectly applied her idea of false humility to those accusers that labeled her as unworthy of God's gifts, and used it as a denouncement of their own deception. The distinction between false and true humility worked as a limit for the power of some theologians that were suspicious of her raptures and visions. Teresa went as far as to write that "some things cannot be understood, no matter how much knowledge [*letras*] we have" (*Cuenta de conciencia 53.29*).

Teresa declared humility as the limit for theologians' reliance on formal knowledge. Although *letras* are a wonderful instrument, Teresa vigorously pointed out that there were certain things outside the reach of this knowledge. The ability to recognize the limits of *letras* was nothing other than humility, Teresa claimed. And she not only demanded humility from her nuns (she did so repeatedly in *The Way of Perfection*) but also from her addressee and confessor, Father García de Toledo. In *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa explicitly advised her confessor to exercise his faith and humility, in what was a clear inversion of their roles in the ecclesial hierarchy.⁹⁰ She defined humility as a science in which a certain old little lady (*viejecita*), clearly a reference to herself, was wiser than him, even despite the fact that he was a *letrado* (34.12). She acknowledged her greater experience and compared it to his *letras*. She exhorted him to be humble enough to acknowledge that, when it came to the actual experience of prayer, he fell short. *Letras* could only do so much

⁹⁰ For a thorough analysis of Teresa's role reversal with her confessors, see Elena Carrera's *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography*.

to help those on the path of prayer. A few chapters earlier, Teresa had even brought up the issue of gender, and reminded her reader that at times it is God's will to grant more understanding to women than to learned men.⁹¹ She wrote about how her dear friend, doña Guiomar de Ulloa had such faith that she believed Teresa's raptures could only proceed from God at a time when confessors were convinced that Teresa was being tricked by the devil: "Her faith was such that she could only believe that it was the spirit of God what everyone else said was the devil, and since she is a person of great understanding . . . His Majesty wanted to give her light about what *letrados* ignored" (*Life* 30.3).⁹²

Teresa's words were a denunciation. She suggested that a woman's sincere faith and humility could allow her to know things that *letrados* could not. She could find a truth that God kept hidden from the wise men. Not surprisingly, this sort of rhetoric put Teresa in a dangerous position, and it did not pass inadvertently for some of her male readers, as we will see in the next chapter. As such, it is not surprising that even a decade after her death, theologians such as Alonso de la Fuente and Juan de Orellana, among others, were still denouncing her subversive writings and condemning her lack of humility.⁹³ These instances in which Teresa demanded humility from her confessors and from learned men make her stand dangerously close to *alumbrados*, who claimed to receive divine inspiration from the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴ Teresa, however, insisted on using the power of her rhetorical strategies in order to place herself on the side of orthodoxy. In an extraordinary fragment of *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa resorted again to doubt, but this time she turned it into the sign of true humility. The truly humble, she wrote, should not judge the faults of

⁹¹ Another good example of this rhetoric in Teresa is *The Way of Perfection* 4.1.

⁹² "Era tanta su fe que no podía sino creer que era espíritu de Dios el que todos los más decían era del demonio, y como es persona de harto buen entendimiento . . . quiso Su Majestad darla luz en lo que los letrados ignoraban."

⁹³ See Llamas Martínez, especially part two. See also Hollis for a thorough analysis of Teresa's humility in relation to her status as author, especially pages 39-41.

⁹⁴ See note 19, for the attitude of extreme certainty displayed by *alumbrados* such as Isabel de la Cruz and Pedro Ruiz de Alcaraz.

others, but rather continually doubt themselves: “It is very appropriate to be always careful . . . But I return to warn you that, although you think you may have a virtue, fear that you may be deceived. Because the truly humble are always doubtful about their own virtues, and quite ordinarily they think that virtues in others are truer and of more value” (*Way V* 38.9).⁹⁵

Just as she used doubt to recognize the sincerely humble, Teresa also used the distinction between true and false humility as a way of defending against accusations of arrogance for writing, teaching, and usurping the men’s prerogative of theological disquisition. Although her rhetorical strategies managed to downplay her tone of reproach directed at confessors and theologians, they did not shield her against the suspicions of inquisitors, and against accusations of heresy. Besides using humility as a rhetorical device, Teresa found a way of understanding true humility as an impediment for deception. By sticking to a self-made definition of true humility, not only was she able to bring a light of legitimacy to her writings, teachings, and visions, but she was also guarded against the tricks employed by the devil to make believers doubt the mercy of God.

Conclusion

The idea of deception remained at the core of Teresa’s life, as it was for any visionary woman in early modern Spain. The question of her authenticity and her orthodoxy was always at stake, even after her death. Teresa seems to have been keenly aware of this problem, and as a result, we find her tackling the idea of deception throughout her work. As Teresa contemplated many times the possibility of being deceived (by the devil, by her imagination, and by others), she simultaneously had to react to accusations of being a deceiver. In addressing this double-edged

⁹⁵ “Mucho hace al caso andar siempre sobre aviso . . . Mas tórnoos a avisar que, aunque os parezca la tenéis, temáis que os engañáis. Porque el verdadero humilde siempre anda dudoso en virtudes propias, y muy ordinariamente le parecen más ciertas y de más valor las que ve en sus prójimos.”

problem, Teresa made use of different rhetorical strategies, which have been brought to our attention by the ground-breaking work of Alison Weber. On the other hand, Weber's work raises new questions, especially regarding Teresa's sincerity. If Teresa responded to accusations of heresy and to her own insecurities of being deceived by devising complex rhetorical strategies, how much of her message is truly sincere? In other words, were those exclamations of fear of being deceived just a façade to protect herself from the suspicions of religious authorities? Or did Teresa really fear the possibility of being tricked by the devil or her own imagination? Weber formulated the problem in a similar fashion: "Did her writing reflect conscious rhetorical devices, or was it a sincere projection of her personality?" (*Rhetoric* 5). This question still needs further analysis. My research reveals that the evidence found in Teresa's texts is ambiguous at best, and often contradictory. However, this might not be a question of either/or, and we should not discard the possibility of both alternatives being true, either simultaneously or continually.

Teresa's interpretation of the meaning of deception was very fluid. Deception played an important role in her definition of other concepts, such as doubt, theological knowledge, and humility. It also likely influenced some of her personal relationships to confessors and superiors. And, since deception was not a monolithic or stable concept, Teresa had to negotiate its limits with religious authorities for the legitimization of her visions and her orthodoxy. In this process of negotiation, deception clearly emerged as a category of contested power between a visionary woman and her superiors, and the issue of gender was at the center of it. Teresa was aware of the fundamental disadvantages that women faced during her time. While she bitterly complained about them, she simultaneously echoed misogynistic ideas that would help her elude accusations for trying to teach, against what St. Paul had mandated. Still, Teresa can be seen as a true advocate for women, not only in her defense of their right to a spiritual life, mental prayer, and ultimately, a

direct and individual experience of God, but in her rejection of the image of women as deceivers. Even during her later years, when Teresa suspected the raptures that some of her nuns were experiencing, she refused to explain them as their intention to deceive. Rather, she explained these raptures as physical frailty or as lack of theological training. What is more, Teresa believed that men and women were spiritual equals, and she attributed to women more faith than men, and a greater capacity or disposition to receive God's gifts.

Regarding her visions, Teresa expressed many doubts and fears that she could have been deceived by the devil or by her own imagination. After the initial apprehension from her confessors, she managed to come up with a logical defense for the authenticity of her visions. She structured this defense around three main strategies: first, a tautological claim that supported the legitimacy of the visions on the impossibility to doubt them; second, on the grounds of her more virtuous moral behavior; and finally, on the conformity of her visions with the Holy Scriptures. This last strategy, the adherence of the visions to the Church's doctrine, was problematic because it implied that Teresa could only go so far in her defense of the authenticity of her visions. Ultimately, it was the job of theologians to determine whether her visions were within the realm of orthodoxy or not, and Teresa had to submit to their opinion. However, she profited from the controversies that emerged around her visions and her reforming efforts, and ended up subjecting herself only to those superiors who aligned with her own ideas. Weber has explained that the Carmelite's commitment to obedience was "belied by Teresa's dexterity in interpreting ambiguous situations in her favor and in seeking out an authority whose will coincided with her own" (*Rhetoric* 133).

In my analysis of Teresa's use of the concept of deception understood as doubt, we find that, once faced with the dilemma to communicate or withhold her visions from her confessors, Teresa decidedly chose to seek their advice. She argued that this was the most secure way to

prevent deception, but she reminded them that this decision implied a great exposure and many risks. In this sense, it is worth asking if Teresa wouldn't have been better off by simply concealing her experiences. It is possible that she decided to disclose her experiences to her confessors, either because it was preferable and less suspicious to tell them herself rather than let the rumors of her raptures and visions get to them, or because she was truly doubtful of what was happening to her. Whatever the case, allegations of being a deceiver or a deceived visionary would be the inescapable. The fact that Teresa chose to speak up means that she preferred to submit to the orthodoxy of the Church and to her confessors' opinions, which distanced her from the infamous *beatas* and *alumbrados*. She also suggested that the nuns in her reformed convents would always consult with confessors about their spiritual experiences. This submission served as a strategy that deferred accusations against Teresa. We saw how her confessor, father Domingo Báñez, precisely because she had communicated her spiritual visions with him, reasoned that she "at least was not a deceiver".

Teresa had no option but to depend on *letrados* for their interpretation of her spiritual experiences. This implied that she would be accused and persecuted if these men were relentless, and potentially deceived if they were mediocre. When Teresa spoke of the possibility of being deceived (in the sense of lacking theological training), she held that only confessors who sought for themselves a deep mystical experience of God while simultaneously being experienced theologians were to be true allies and guides. Thus, Teresa insisted on finding *espirituales* who were simultaneously renowned *letrados*. She resorted to *espirituales*, because they did not condemn her spiritual visions, understood and often shared her method of prayer, and could provide her with their legitimizing authority for her spiritual experiences if they had a solid theological training. This group of people, who counted with both the experience of mental prayer

and with the training on theology avowed by the Catholic Church, became warrantors of her visionary activity. They became for Teresa the platform from which she could ascertain to herself and others that she was not herself a deceiver, nor falling victim to the devil's deceit. Furthermore, confessor who were both *letrados* and *espirituales* accepted Teresa's claim that *letras*, by themselves, were not enough to achieve union with God. This acceptance enabled her to act as the teacher of a legitimate spiritual practice and subverted ecclesial hierarchy between her and her superiors.

Finally, Teresa also constructed a definition of deception as false humility, which kept her away from mental prayer, and became an obstacle in her path to union with God. Teresa often used differentiations between false and true virtues to elaborate a discourse that shielded her from accusations of deception. In this redefinition of humility, to be deceived equaled being so humble that she became unworthy of God, and therefore, distanced from Him. Teresa's discourse of humility also allowed her to split her situation into two rivaling groups: on the one side, true humility, herself, and trust in God; on the other, false humility, accusers, and deception. Teresa went one step further as she demanded humility from her confessors, and exhorted them to better understand the spiritual experiences of their visionary penitents. This demand is important, as her accusers would, in all likelihood, interpret it as a subversion of ecclesial hierarchy and as her attempt to gain authority over her superiors. It was a risky demand, and it could indicate that she was genuinely worried about the treatment that confessors gave to their visionary penitents. The exposure of being accused, as it indeed happened, of wanting to teach against Paul's mandate, likely mattered less for Teresa than expressing her concern about the relation between confessors and visionary nuns.

Teresa was an exceptionally careful writer, not a candid one. She employed a wide variety of articulated strategies, explanations, and rhetorical resources to distance herself from deception. She simultaneously disputed accusations of being a deceiver and navigated the possibility of her own self-deception. This is what I have termed her rhetoric of deception. Her conscious rhetoric, plagued with redefinitions and with the negotiation of meanings with religious authorities, suggests that she wrote for potentially suspicious readers, and fiercely defended the legitimacy of her spiritual visions. Teresa's deliberate use of a rhetoric of deception points to her awareness of the conflicts that her message generated, but it also reveals some of her deeply held convictions, many of which were simply the product of her time. Everything from her misogynistic statements, her use of doubt, or her ambiguous relation with *letrados* and theological knowledge, signal that Teresa's rhetorical strategies cannot be reduced to mere "lip service formulas" (Pérez-Romero 159), but are complex networks of nuanced concepts, and often contradicting goals. In the next chapter, I provide an analysis of how the theologians who accused Teresa of being either a deceiver or deceived, interpreted and received her rhetoric of deception.

CHAPTER 4. DECEIVER OR DECEIVED? ACCUSATIONS OF DECEPTION AGAINST TERESA

In the previous chapter, I identified and discussed the ways in which Teresa defined the concept of deception, and analyzed her use of this idea to validate her own mystical experience. It is now time to turn to those who formally accused Teresa of being either a deceiver or a victim of the devil's deceit. In the following pages, I approach the concept of deception applied to Teresa by some of her opponents, theologians Alonso de la Fuente, Juan de Lorenzana, Juan de Orellana, and Francisco de Pisa. These men presented formal accusations at the Inquisition's tribunals based on Teresa's written work, and they invariably invoked the idea of deception. The accusers examined Teresa's intentions as visionary, and raised the question of whether she was deceived or a deceiver. All of them paid close attention to Teresa's writings, and they copiously quoted her words in their attempt to prove her deviations from orthodoxy. It is impossible to determine if their accusations were motivated by religious zeal, personal resentment against Teresa, or plain misogyny. But rather than dismiss their arguments as radical religious fervor or sexism, I approach these accusations from the perspective of reader response criticism, by making use of the concept of interpretive communities.

Teresa's accusers form what Stanley Fish has called "interpretive communities." Fish has described these communities as being "made up of those who share interpretive strategies . . . [which] exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" (171). In other words, the accusers shared an ideological background that led them to form similar conclusions about Teresa after reading her work. But not all theologians who read Teresa's writings reached the same conclusions, and therefore, not all of them belonged to the same interpretive communities. The differentiation that Teresa established between *espirituales* and

letrados speaks to how keenly aware she was of the disputes between these two communities: while the former held her as a holy person, the latter considered her as deceitful. Although my work is centered on the analysis of the second group, it is important to remember that a large number of prominent theologians defended the legitimacy of Teresa's accounts of supernatural phenomena, including Inquisitor General Cardinal Gaspar de Quiroga, and prestigious religious figures such as Peter of Alcántara and John of Ávila. This nuance is relevant to my work, because Teresa's final success owed much to the men who defended the legitimacy of her visions, and to those who softened their stance on visionary women. It is precisely to this group of men who held positions of power within the Church that Teresa directed her rhetoric of deception, and because they were influenced by it, she was able to move from deceiver to deceived, and finally to saint.

Teresa's accusers not only formed a very homogeneous interpretive community, but they were also acute and attentive readers of her texts. Allison Weber identified this characteristic in Alonso de la Fuente (*Rhetoric* 161), but the same thing could be said about the rest of them. All four theologians addressed her contradictions and detected her rhetorical strategies. They paid close attention to the words she used, and how she justified her visions through an obedience that, they argued, was not at all consistent. Their charges against her were founded on expert theological knowledge, and their fears were in conformity to the context of Reformation and religious reform that was developing in sixteenth-century Spain. They pointed to her spiritual visions as a key cause for their apprehensions, and worried that Teresa was only one example of a widespread phenomenon of visionary women all across Spain. They feared the potential risk of such women to deceive and mislead believers. But these men were simultaneously aware of the difficult task they had at hand in accusing of unorthodoxy and deception a woman whose reputation for holiness

kept on growing. Nevertheless, the fact that they insisted on their accusations is indicative of their mounting fear that Teresa's works could become a path to deception.

Enrique Llamas Martínez has produced the most extensive and detailed account of Teresa's encounters with the Inquisition. In his pivotal work, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la inquisición española* first published in 1972, he made a careful examination of the historical background to these accusations, and he entirely reproduced the documents submitted by the accusers to the Inquisition. Llamas Martínez divided the story of Teresa and the Inquisition into two parts: accusations against Teresa's moral behavior, and accusations against her written work. My analysis focuses exclusively on allegations against the written work of Teresa, and as such, it disregards charges centered on her personal behavior. The main reasons for this limitation on the scope of my investigation, include the unavailability of the first reports presented to the Inquisition Tribunal in Córdoba in 1574; the fact that accusations against Teresa's moral behavior were ultimately withdrawn by the accusers themselves;⁹⁶ and finally, the need to analyze written texts so that results may be comparable to the study of Teresa's works. Some of the accusations made against Teresa's morality included charges of sexual misconduct and allegations that the nuns were forced to confess with the prioress (Llamas 73-77). As we will see in chapter 4, when I assess Teresa's case against that of her contemporary Francisca de los Apóstoles, accusations of sexual misconduct and subversion of ecclesial authority remained deeply connected to the idea of deception.

The written reports presented by the four accusers provide this study with a solid base of texts that evidence the reaction of a specific group of Teresa's readers. This group, the interpretive

⁹⁶ Allegations against Teresa's sexual misconduct, which involved her dear friend and confessor Jerónimo Gracián, were quickly withdrawn by the same nuns that had brought them to the tribunal. See Llamas Martínez, chapter 2 of part I.

community composed of four trained and renowned theologians, expressed concern over some of her ideas, which they considered heterodox at the very least, and inspired by the devil, at the very worst. This group shared a similar definition of theology, ecclesiastical hierarchy, womanhood, and visionary activity. Those shared ideas or interpretive strategies, to use Fish's terms, determined their conclusive judgement on Teresa as deceived or deceiver. The study of their accusations facilitate a comparison between her definition and use of the concept of deception and theirs. The impossibility of concurrence between Teresa and her prosecutors emerges precisely from this divergence. While Teresa used rhetorical strategies and arguments to defend against accusations of deception, accusers unveiled such strategies and concluded that she must have been either a deceiver or a victim of deceit.

Alonso de la Fuente: The Wind That Runs at Night

The information available on Alonso de la Fuente (1533-1594) is fragmentary.⁹⁷ He was a respected theologian and a Dominican friar who often served as *calificador* for the Inquisition, especially during the trials against the *alumbrados* of Extramadura. Historian Marina Torres Arce has defined *calificadores* as clerics who worked as consultants for the Inquisition. Inquisitors often commissioned them to issue their professional opinion on the statements, confessions, and written works of the accused (192). Although Llamas Martínez does not cite any primary sources, he summarized some relevant aspects of De la Fuente's background. For this, he relied heavily on the work of historians Luis Sala Balust and Vicente Beltrán de Heredia. It is from Balust that we learn of De la Fuente's origin in Llerena, the same town that hosted the most notorious group of *alumbrados* during the 1570s, for whom De la Fuente became the first and most ardent prosecutor

⁹⁷ Dates on De la Fuente remain uncertain. The ones referred here are provided by Gillian Ahlgren, p. 115.

(Llamas 308). It is noteworthy that after 17 years of experience in identifying the threat of *alumbradismo* to the Catholic doctrine, De la Fuente could sufficiently argue that Teresa's works resonated with the ideas of this heresy. However, Alison Weber has discussed the problematic reception by the Inquisition of his charges against *alumbrados*. Weber has demonstrated that De la Fuente's extreme zealousness sometimes generated political turmoil. For example, in 1576, Inquisitor General Gaspar de Quiroga, a supporter of Teresa, punished De la Fuente for creating trouble with the Portuguese Inquisitor, Cardinal Prince Enrique, who complained about De la Fuente's offensive against him and against the Jesuit order to King Philip II. As a result, De la Fuente was secluded in a monastery and banned to preach against *alumbrados*, but this would not be the end of his crusade against the sect ("Demonizing Ecstasy" 151-2).

According to Llamas Martínez, the first time Alonso de la Fuente contacted the Inquisition about Teresa was by a letter dated on August 26, 1589, seven years after the nun's death, and a year after the first publication of *The Book of Her Life*.⁹⁸ De la Fuente considered the work to contain heretical proposals, and he explicitly named *alumbrados* (Llamas 396). Three times he compared Teresa's work, which he considered rife with heresy, to the biblical description of "the terrible wind that blew in the sea at night, of which Saint Mark talks about."⁹⁹ The idea of deception first emerges in the letter when De la Fuente claimed Teresa couldn't possibly be the author of such a book, as it exceeded the capacity of a woman: "The author of the said book sells it and entrusts it as doctrine revealed by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit. If it was, in fact, written by the nun, as its title indicates, it is a *preter naturam* thing, and a something taught by an angel, as it

⁹⁸ The first edition of Teresa's works was published in 1588 in Salamanca. The edition, prepared by Fray Luis de León, included *The Book of Her Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle*, and *Exclamations*. For the first publication of Teresa's works see Llamas, p. 294. For information on De la Fuente's letter of 1589 to the Inquisition, see Llamas, p. 310.

⁹⁹ "El viento terrible que sopló en la mar de noche, de que habla san Marcos." De la Fuente referred to Mar 4: 35-41.

exceeds the capacity of women” (Llamas 396).¹⁰⁰ This statement sets the ground for the possibility of fraud: either Teresa was not the author of the book, and its real author had attributed it to her with the purpose of gaining greater diffusion, or she was inspired by an angel. In either case, she was dissociated from her written production, and her capacity to have a deep knowledge of spiritual matters was utterly rejected.

De la Fuente seemed so certain of the heretical nature of Teresa’s work that he could only explain the book to be written by someone other than her, even if this someone was an evil spirit, most likely as he stated, the same one that deceived Mohammed and Luther. De la Fuente then moved on to suggest that the rumors circulating about Teresa’s incorruptible body must consequently also be either a myth, a trick from the devil, or the invention of heretics (Llamas 311).¹⁰¹ For him, there was no middle ground, and there were but two options: either the book was not written by Teresa and she was truly a good woman, or it was the work of a supernatural evil force, operating through her. The work, he affirmed, clearly contained heresies, and needed to be evaluated by the Council of the Inquisition. After the analysis of Teresa’s use of rhetorical strategies such as doubt and humility, the vehemence of De la Fuente cannot go unnoticed. His language is the reflection of the authority that he knew he had, both as a man and as a prestigious theologian. His tone is one that Teresa could never aspire to express, and as such, he emerges as an illuminating contrasting point that helps to assess Teresa’s discourse, continually based on self-doubt. As a representative of religious authorities, De la Fuente could write more carelessly than Teresa, even though he remained subject to the hierarchy of the Church and thus submitted his

¹⁰⁰ “El autor de dicho libro lo vende y encomienda por doctrina revelada de Dios e inspirada por el Espíritu Santo. Que si en efecto fue la monja, como suena el título dél es negocio *preter naturam* y cosa enseñada por ángel, porque excede la capacidad de mujer.”

¹⁰¹ “Mas, no fue posible ser ángel bueno, sino ángel malo, y el mismo que engañó a Mahoma y a Lutero y a los demás heresiarcas. Y siendo esto así, el milagro que se dice de la monja Teresa de Jesús, que está hoy entera e incorrupta, es negocio fabuloso, o prestigio de satanás, o invención de herejes.”

opinions to the evaluation of wiser men (Llamas 399). By comparison, Teresa, being a woman and a subordinate to clerics was in a more precarious position. Her written word required a more cautious measurement.

It is likely that after De la Fuente sent his first letter denouncing the peril of heresy found in Teresa's published works, the Council required from him a more detailed explanation of his accusation (Llamas 314-5). This request could explain the five documents that De la Fuente claimed to have sent to the Council, out of which four remain at the National Historical Archive in Madrid. The second one was lost, but is referenced several times in the others and in different letters sent by De la Fuente to the Council (Llamas 397-8). His first document (which he called *memorial*) opens with a direct accusation of deception. De la Fuente compared the author of the book, whom he refused to identify, with a thief that goes out at night, and secretly perpetrates his crime. He then used a second analogy, the mixture of water and oil, to convey the message of a surreptitious mixture of heresy and orthodoxy in Teresa's works. De la Fuente considered that this mixture of good and bad doctrine was designed to deliberately confuse readers. The passage is worthy of a reproduction here: "It is to be presupposed, according to my opinion, that the author of this book, as a secret thief, adds a sect of mistakes into his writing, and the apprehensive Catholic reader may not understand it. And so, the author mixes lie with truth and water with oil, as Saint Jerome said of the hidden heretics" (Llamas 389).¹⁰²

The use of terms such as *ladrón secreto*, secret thief, and *hereje oculto*, hidden heretic, is meaningful. They both point to a criminal act, since we must keep in mind that, at the time, both theft and heresy were prosecutable crimes punishable by law. But the adjectives *secreto* and *oculto*

¹⁰² "Presupónese ante todas cosas, conforme a mi opinión, que el autor de este libro como ladrón secreto va metiendo secta de errores en esta escritura, y juntamente recatándose no le entienda el católico. Y así va mezclando la mentira con la verdad y el agua con el aceite, como dijo san Jerónimo de los herejes ocultos."

imply secrecy as a way of covering up or hiding the truth. This reference to secrecy is an indication of the intentional purpose of deceiving. For De la Fuente, the intention of Teresa's work to confuse and deceive the reader was plainly visible, and it denoted a greater fault in the author. He was also incapable of reconciling the rumors about the Carmelite's holiness with what he saw as clear evidence of heresy in her written work. De la Fuente wrote his five accusative *memoriales* as the debate on Teresa's saintliness was starting to develop. There were circulating stories about the incorruptibility of her body, and miracles were being attributed to her.¹⁰³ Her group of supporters kept on growing and De la Fuente could sense that his accusations would be unwelcomed by many. This atmosphere could be a partial explanation as to why he chose to question the authorship of Teresa's works. His safest bet in order not to diminish the gravity of the accusations, of which he was deeply convinced, was to blur the name of the accused author.

De la Fuente insisted on establishing the clandestine condition of this unidentified criminal who sought to deceive as a way of diverting his accusations away from Teresa. If she was a holy woman, in no way could she be the author of the works attributed to her. In the first *memorial*, De la Fuente made a general accusation in which he identified the doctrine in Teresa's book to that of the *alumbrados* that he knew so well: "This doctrine that is taught here is the same one that *alumbrados* in Extremadura were teaching" (Llamas 398).¹⁰⁴ He delineated very specific accusations divided into 11 articles, each of them followed by his own theological evaluation. These accusations are preceded by De la Fuente's reminder of his own experience, namely that he had worked to combat the heresy of *alumbradismo* for seventeen years. He claimed to have thoroughly read Teresa's book and asked to be believed in his appreciations. He justified his

¹⁰³ A thorough examination of the circumstances around Teresa's incorruptibility may be found in the work of Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain*.

¹⁰⁴ "Esta doctrina que aquí se enseña es la misma que enseñaban los alumbrados de Extremadura."

competency as judge in the matter, based on the fact that he had been a firsthand witness of the rituals of the heretical *alumbrados*, but he also adduced his good reasoning, his zeal for the Catholic faith, and his verisimilitude. The accuser claimed to have understood the sense and meaning of Teresa's works, and requested to be trusted as any historian would be (Llamas 399).

De la Fuente divided his first *memorial* into articles, the first of which is an attack on Teresa's rhetoric of humility. The *calificador* considered various statements in the book as outright expressions of vanity: "Amidst many words that carry a humble meaning, she says a million vanities" (Llamas 400).¹⁰⁵ He reprobated claims made by Teresa about how she was liked by many people, or how she converted several priests. It is difficult to accurately know to which specific passages De la Fuente was referring. However, he could have been mentioning the episode described in *The Book of Her Life*, chapter 5.3-5.6 in which Teresa remembered how she inspired a priest to return to celibacy after he had publicly maintained an affair with a local woman. De la Fuente deliberately exaggerated Teresa's claims, such as "that everyone appraised her very much . . . that she converted many preachers," thus revealing a strong predisposition against her (Llamas 400).¹⁰⁶ De la Fuente's identification of Teresa's rhetoric of humility reveals, as Antonio Pérez-Romero, has said, that he recognized "Teresa's tricks" (23). Pérez-Romero echoed Weber's opinion of De la Fuente as an attentive reader of Teresa, and it is noteworthy that De la Fuente does not take at face value many of Teresa's statements.

In the second article, he proceeded to question Teresa's relation with *espirituales* and suspected that her difficult relation with *letrados* was the result of her being possessed or inspired by an evil spirit: "What she says about not finding someone for 20 years who understood her, makes me very suspicious that hers was a pilgrim spirit, different from the spirit of God, which

¹⁰⁵ "Entre muchas palabras que tienen sentido humilde, dice un millón de vanidades."

¹⁰⁶ "Que todo el mundo la estimaba mucho . . . que convertía a muchos predicadores."

can be understood by the Church and his ministers. And what she says about wise men who do not understand her, confirms this suspicion of an evil spirit” (Llamas 400).¹⁰⁷ De la Fuente defended that *letrados* could only deal with spirits guided by God; not with evil spirits. Consequently, if Teresa had difficulties establishing relations with and gaining the trust of *letrados*, it had to be because her raptures were originated in something evil. The accuser’s words suggest that Teresa was either possessed or influenced by an evil spirit, or even that she was so herself. This claim takes us back to the idea of Teresa being the victim of the devil’s deception, but also to the possibility that she was herself the deceiver. The accuser largely agreed with those confessors who considered Teresa’s experiences to be the work of the devil, and he revisited the idea of the evil spirit several times throughout his first *memorial*.

De la Fuente also suspected Teresa and her relation with *espirituales*: “she clearly seems to talk about the masters of this deception, called *espirituales*, who have dealings with the devil, although they have him for God” (Llamas 400).¹⁰⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, for Teresa, *espirituales* practiced mental prayer and sought an inner and individual path to God. But not for De la Fuente. For him, *espirituales* were masters of deception who had deals with the devil, and for whom the devil was a god. He considered the raptures described by Teresa as similar to the experiences he witnessed in *alumbrados*. Without exception, all descriptions of supernatural experiences and visions were for him evidence of heresy and the work of the devil. And yet, although De la Fuente identified the devil as author of Teresa’s raptures and visions as well as those of *espirituales*, he refused to state whether her role was that of victim or accomplice of Satan.

¹⁰⁷ “En cuanto dice que en 20 años no halló quien la entendiese, hácese grave sospecha que su espíritu era peregrino y diferente del espíritu de Dios, con quien la Iglesia y sus ministros se entienden. Y en cuanto dice que los sabios no la entienden confirma la sospecha del mal espíritu.”

¹⁰⁸ “Parece claramente hablar de los maestros deste engaño, que se llaman espirituales y se entienden con el demonio, aunque le tienen por Dios.”

He merely identified the devil as author of all supernatural experiences, and rendered all of her accounts of spiritual visions as illegitimate.

De la Fuente did not spare criticism for the *letrados* who dealt with Teresa either. He especially condemned their willingness to accept her as teacher: “To have learned men come and learn from a woman, and to acknowledge her as head in matters of prayer and spiritual doctrine . . . reveals the novelty of this doctrine, which this woman mastered, and the little sense of the learned men who subjected to her” (Llamas 402).¹⁰⁹ In the previous chapter, we have seen how Teresa often alternated between submitting to the authority of *letrados*, and requesting them to acknowledge their own lack of experience on visions, raptures, and mental prayer. De la Fuente noted these contradictions, and interpreted them as Teresa’s stubborn inversion of the natural hierarchy, determined by male dominance. He explained these rebellious claims as the product of female’s wicked nature. Moreover, he placed Teresa within what he considered to be a long-standing tradition of women whose intent was to deceive wise men: “It is not a new thing that women with an erroneous life and doctrine deceive wise and eminent men, for one deceived Origin and another one deceived Paul” (Llamas 402).¹¹⁰ These ideas were not uncommon among theologians, who, as scholar Rosalynn Voaden has argued, based their misogynistic attitudes on two principles: “first, that women are by nature corporeal, sensual, and carnal, and second, that all women bear the taint of Eve . . . the second [conviction derived] from the belief that all women are prone to being deceived, incapable of distinguishing God’s truth from the devil’s blandishments, willing to deceive in their turn and a source of spiritual contamination” (7).

¹⁰⁹ “Venir hombres doctos a aprender de una mujer y reconocerla por cabeza en negocios de oración y doctrina espiritual, como se colige de muchos lugares de este libro, es argumento de la novedad de esta doctrina, en que esta mujer era sabia, y del poco seso de los hombres doctos que se le sujetaron.”

¹¹⁰ “No es nuevo las mujeres de vida y doctrina errada engañar a los hombres sabios y eminentes, porque una engañó a Orígenes y otra a Paulo.”

For De la Fuente, the possibility of deception in Teresa was not merely linked to her condition of visionary, but also to that of a woman. The fact that she claimed to have visions and raptures made her a suspect, but the fact that she was a woman justified and amplified these suspicions. For De la Fuente, women who claimed to have raptures and visions were inevitably acting under the influence of Satan. Furthermore, in a direct contradiction of Teresa's claims, De la Fuente established an inverse correlation between moral conduct and spiritual visions: the more reproachable was a person, the more likely and most intensely she was to experience visions. And although De la Fuente conceded that it was possible for God to grant such mystical graces, according to his logic, such marvels only happened sporadically. The fact that such spiritual experiences would happen to sinful people was, in and of itself, enough reason to recognize them as the work of the devil (Llamas 408). He explained the raptures of *alumbrados* as faintings that would happen especially in women, who he accused of being succubus (Llamas 412).¹¹¹ Although he acknowledged that the experiences of raptures in *alumbrados* were common to both men and women, he exclusively attributed sexual misconduct to women.

Unlike Teresa, De la Fuente was not ready to consider doubt. He felt certain of his doctrine, and he did not negotiate with Teresa's rhetorical strategies. He outright dismissed the possibility of understanding her experience. To him, Teresa's accounts of visions and raptures were the work of an evil spirit; no further explanation could be possible or valid. De la Fuente adamantly claimed that Teresa championed heretical ideas. He listed, among others, her notion that the highest attainable goal for a Christian was union with God; her idea of a deep or innermost (*fondón*) part of the soul where such union occurred; that this union happened with the suspension of the powers

¹¹¹ Succubus, according to the medieval mythology, were devils that used the appearance of attractive women to seduce men, particularly pious men. See Jane Davidson's *Early Modern Supernatural*, p. 40. De la Fuente failed to explain how real women would be transformed into such devilish creatures, but he seems to suggest the work of transformation is done by the devil himself.

(memory, volition, intellect); that from the experience of union derived all sorts of virtues and graces; that union was such an unfathomable experience that it could not be fully explained with words; that the path to union was mainly composed of mental prayer, contemplation, mortification, penance, and good works. De la Fuente considered these ideas as heresies, and he identified them as common to Teresa as well as to *alumbrados*. Although these ideas only tangentially speak to the subject of deception, it is necessary to recall that, according to the theological discourse embodied by De la Fuente, heretics were deceived. The term he and other theologians used to describe someone who had fallen out of orthodoxy was precisely that of *engañados*, or the deceived.

De la Fuente dedicated the largest part of his *memoriales* to contest Teresa's heretical ideas, yet he remained ambiguous in determining Teresa's degree of involvement and guilt as deceiver. It is noteworthy that, throughout most of the four surviving documents, De la Fuente directed his attacks to the heresies themselves, rather than at Teresa as a person. But he still managed to make serious allegations. Perhaps one of the gravest ones was his claim that the author of the book deliberately intended to confuse the Catholic believer and attempted to deceive the faithful with help from the devil:

It is to be supposed that this author along with those of his school, as fanatic spirits and prophets of the devil, by sowing heresy and a hidden sect in the same chapter and in the same page and in the same clause, they use the said terms in two ways: one, to found their sect; the other one, to strip away the Catholic and leave him bewitched. (Llamas 418)¹¹²

In this particular excerpt, De la Fuente was referring to the ambivalence in the meaning of the terms Teresa used to define the type of prayer she was teaching her nuns. De la Fuente argued

¹¹² “Se ha de presuponer que este autor con los de su escuela, como unos espíritus fanáticos y profetas del demonio, sembrando la herejía y secta ocultísima, en un mismo capítulo y en una misma página y en una misma cláusula usan de los dichos términos en dos sentidos. Del uno usan para fundar su secta; del otro para desvelar al Católico y dejarlo encantado.”

that, for instance, Teresa referred to prayer alternatively as the practice avowed by the Catholic Church, and as an exercise that functioned as prelude to raptures and supernatural visions. In the quoted fragment, De la Fuente identified the active intention of the author to confuse and deceive the reader, and he then supported this claim with various examples taken from *The Book of Her Life* and *The Way of Perfection*. De la Fuente considered that in making use of the terms that pertained to the realm of the Catholic Church, such as prayer, to then endow them with new meaning, Teresa was actively trying to deceive her readers (Llamas 418). This idea became the strongest accusation he made against Teresa. He tried to demonstrate that the author of the book had purposely appealed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church to infiltrate it with the “poison” of heresies and thus gain from the confusion of followers (Llamas 421). The accuser did not try to hide his indignation at what he considered an outright trick from Teresa and the *alumbrados* (he referred simultaneously to both) to deceive religious authorities. In a reference to chapter 29 of *The Book of Her Life* in which Teresa claimed that God was upset at her confessors for commanding her to refrain from mental prayer,¹¹³ De la Fuente likened *alumbrados* and Teresa as rebels who protested against the regulations of the Catholic Church:

She argues against Catholics, protesting that they take away mental prayer. And this is the same thing that the *alumbrados* of Extremadura said: “By the justice of God, they take away our mental prayer.” And although we replied to them “we do not take away mental prayer, but the invocation of the devil and the *dejamiento* that you call mental prayer,” we could not defend ourselves from them.” (Llamas 420)¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Life* 29.6: “When they took away my prayer it seemed to me that He had been upset, and He told me to tell them that this was tyranny.”

¹¹⁴ “Arguye a los católicos diciendo que quitan la oración mental. Y esto mismo hacían los *alumbrados* de Extremadura, diciendo a voces: “Justicia de Dios, que nos quitan la oración mental.” Y aunque se les replicaba “no quitamos la oración mental, sino la invocación del demonio y el *dejamiento* que vosotros llamáis oración mental,” no nos podíamos defender de ellos.”

This impossibility of dialogue between De la Fuente and Teresa's work stemmed, at least in part, from the discordant definitions that each of them ascribed to mental prayer. Teresa seemed to point to mental prayer as a path to union with God. De la Fuente, on the other hand, considered the idea of union an impossibility, and even a heresy. Weber has made the case that De la Fuente was an extremist, even for many inquisitors. She has demonstrated that some religious authorities in Spain "were sympathetic to mental prayer," while De la Fuente, however, considered "contemplation and possession" as related concepts ("Demonizing," 155). Although he never defined it in his letters and *memoriales* to the Inquisition, it is possible to infer that for him, mental prayer was supposed to be a continuation and perhaps an amplification of vocal prayer. For Teresa, instead, mental prayer was a door to something else: it led to the experience of divine grace. But there was also the utter impossibility for De la Fuente and for all confessors, inquisitors, and theologians, to verify in what exactly consisted the practice of mental prayer. The Church and its ministers simply had no way of controlling the interior images or thoughts that a believer used during mental prayer. They could only address the external signs. It is precisely because of this limitation to the external signs that De la Fuente felt legitimized by his condition of witness to the rituals of the *alumbrados*.

Dale Schuger has suggested that the need to control religious practice was a consequence of the intricate process that Christianity suffered during the sixteenth century. The many heresies and heterodox practices that confronted the monopoly of orthodoxy of the Catholic Church, the efforts to reform Catholicism, Luther's Reformation, the influence of Erasmus among many other movements, challenged the position of the Catholic Church in Spain. In her words, "The difficulty of distinguishing renewal, reform, and rupture created a crisis within the Catholic Church, one that led to the creation and imposition of new forms of observation and control of interior religious

experience . . . In order to monitor interior experiences, it was necessary for them to be made exterior, through words and the body” (934-35). The body became then the field where theologians could intervene to exert control over religious heterodoxies.¹¹⁵ This is why De la Fuente directed his criticism to Teresa’s visions and raptures, as they were the bodily expressions of her spiritual knowledge and experience. He also equated Teresa’s raptures to those he had seen in *alumbrados*. For him, her ideas and practices were the same as theirs. He repeatedly affirmed this correspondence, and consequently held Teresa as a heretic.

Teresa’s efforts to systematize and teach a method that encouraged individuals to have an experience of the divine implied the loss of control over religious activity by church officials. Her teachings opened the door to what were regarded as harmful practices, and could potentially lead to deviations from orthodoxy. Pérez-Romero has characterized Teresa’s teachings as a form of spirituality entirely detached from and even in competition with that of the Catholic Church (26-7). But this conclusion overlooks the nuanced and complex religious environment during Spain’s sixteenth century. Not only because it is hard to undisputedly sustain Teresa’s open contravention of the doctrine of the Church, given that she repeatedly declared her submission to it, even on her deathbed, but also because there was no such thing as a monolithic idea of orthodoxy within the Catholic Church.¹¹⁶ As discussed in the first chapter, the debate around spiritual practices was happening inside the ecclesial institution through reforming movements, and outside of it via the Protestant Reformation, just to cite the most obvious examples. Teresa, I argue, never situated herself in opposition or defiance of the Catholic doctrine, and in fact took steps to ensure her

¹¹⁵ For an extensive and now canonic analysis of women’s bodies in relation to medieval and early modern Christianity, see Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

¹¹⁶ In their work *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink cite numerous testimonies, collected during the proceedings for Teresa’s canonization, from some of the nuns that were at her deathbed. They said that she repeatedly exclaimed: “At last, I die a daughter of the Church”. See especially page 935.

submission to ecclesial authority. While she did question many of the assumptions held by theologians, especially regarding the role of women, certain spiritual practices, and supernatural phenomena, the extent to which her ideas competed against established religious forms is still a disputed subject that requires further analysis.

According to Llamas Martínez, De la Fuente never received a response from the Inquisition, not even to confirm they had received his *memoriales*, and De la Fuente bitterly reproached the inquisitors for not having answered any of his allegations. Nevertheless, there was an anonymous response to the accuser's arguments. This defense, which Llamas Martínez dated around the end of 1589, argues that Teresa was one of those rare instances of divine intervention, and her raptures could not be linked to any evil intentions, but rather to the strengthening of the Catholic faith.¹¹⁷ In response to De la Fuente's severe remarks on how Teresa's confessors were "men of little sense" for accepting her as teacher, the anonymous writer resorted to Thomas of Aquinas' authority in order to validate womens' devotion over men's knowledge:

In the way and means and experience and particular things of prayer, it could well be . . . that a woman knows and profits more with the favor of God and with exercise and practice, than a speculative theologian who is dry and undevout, and who could become more devoted by speaking to a spiritual woman, to whom God gives, ordinarily, more devotion, as Saint Thomas says . . . ; because learned men, confident in themselves and in their knowledge, become prideful, and God hides from them; and women, mistrustful of themselves, are humble and capable of being full of God's devotion. (Llamas 429-30)¹¹⁸

This fragment echoes Teresa's defense of women. But this quoted paragraph stands as daring and direct, which might be explained by the fact that it was likely written by a *letrado*,

¹¹⁷ The argument Llamas Martínez provides for this potential dating is that there is no mention of the anonymous defense in the following *memoriales* written by De la Fuente. See page 322.

¹¹⁸ "En el modo y medios y experiencia y cosas particulares de oración, bien puede ser . . . que sepa y guste más una mujer con el favor de Dios y con el ejercicio y experiencia, que no un teólogo especulativo, seco e indevoto, y que se le pegue devoción tratando con una mujer espiritual, a quien Dios da más devoción, de ordinario, según dice santo Tomás . . . ; porque los doctos confiados en sí y en sus letras toman por su culpa ocasión de soberbia y se les esconde Dios; y las mujeres, desconfiadas de sí, son humildes y capaces que Dios las hincha de devoción."

rather than by a censored nun. The anonymous theologian was also meticulous in the quotation of his sources to legitimize his arguments, carefully referring to Saint Thomas and the Bible just in this passage.¹¹⁹ He corroborated that the humility of the devoted woman could be a more straightforward path to God than the pride of the wise man, an idea that Teresa tried to set forth underneath her rhetorical strategies. But even Teresa's defender displayed the prejudiced notion of women's vulnerability in the face of deception. After refuting one by one the many articles in which De la Fuente censored the Carmelite, the anonymous writer expressed his concern for having Teresa's book circulating among laymen and, particularly among women:

Only one thing could be objected about having this book, which deals with visions, revelations, raptures, and other very delicate and spiritual things, circulating in Spanish, in the hands of the learned and unlearned, the religious and the lay, men and women. Because it could be the occasion, particularly for women, to be deceived, by wanting to imitate things that are said in the book, or feign them to deceive others (Llamas 433).¹²⁰

Although women could have a better access to God through their humble devotion than men through their theological training, they were still portrayed as more susceptible to being deceived. For the anonymous defender, the fact that Teresa's book touched on supernatural phenomena meant that it laid the ground for the possibility of deception, especially for women. The defender described potential female readers as either victims deceived by the devil or as fraudulent tricksters. The irony is inescapable: he echoed the accusations made by De la Fuente, but redirected them away from Teresa and against her female audience. Women continually posed the threat of deceiving others; be it because of their vulnerability to the evil spirit's tricks, to the weakness of their intellect, or to their own wicked intentions. The idea of deception was tainted by

¹¹⁹ The references he quotes are *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 82, art. 3; and Matthew 11:25.

¹²⁰ "Solamente se podría con alguna apariencia dudar si cumple que este libro, donde se tratan visiones, revelaciones, raptos y otras cosas muy delicadas y espirituales, ande en romance en manos de doctos e indoctos, religiosos y seglares, hombres y mujeres. Porque parece puede ser ocasión, especialmente a mujeres, para ser engañadas, queriendo imitar cosas que en él se dicen, o fingirlas por engañar a otros."

gender at its core. Visionary women simply couldn't be dissociated from deception. Even when a woman such as Teresa, through her virtue, personality, and extraordinary spiritual experiences was thought to have a privileged position in the eyes of God, her writings would still be considered as a threat from which the poison of deception could always be distilled.

Juan de Lorenzana: the Foundress, Not the Writer

There is no information besides that provided by Llamas Martínez on Juan de Lorenzana. Like De la Fuente, he was also a Dominican, but he had personally met Teresa and had reached a favorable opinion of her at the time (Llamas 365). It was only after Lorenzana's encounter with Juan de Orellana (another Dominican and the third of Teresa's accusers) that he would become suspicious of her. Llamas provided sufficient evidence to support this conclusion. He cited, among other documents, Lorenzana's own *memorial* to the Inquisition, and the testimony of two other witnesses who ratified this idea of Lorenzana's change from being an admirer of Teresa to a fierce critic of her doctrine after his encounter with Orellana (365-69). In 1593, Juan de Lorenzana wrote a lengthy and detailed document condemning Teresa's books. His *memorial* is arguably the most theologically rich document of the ones presented to the Inquisition against Teresa's texts. Lorenzana not only identified Teresa's contradictions, but he also refuted them by quoting a vast arsenal of biblical passages. His intention was to establish strong theological arguments from which to produce a solid and thorough rebuttal of Teresa's religious ideas.

However, from the very beginning it is possible to see ambiguity in Lorenzana's position. He started by stating that he had heard from learned men about the dangerous doctrine of Teresa's books. But he immediately modulated this opinion and clarified that before he got into the issue of doctrine, he had to state that it was not his intention to stain Teresa's reputation: "I do not wish to, nor is it my intention to taint the person of Teresa of Jesus, as I think of her as a virtuous and

good woman, because she underwent many difficulties in founding a good Religion and she succeeded, and we have seen very good effects from this foundation” (Llamas 445).¹²¹ Lorenzana began by declaring his respect for Teresa, and his admiration for her reform of the Carmelite order. He even asserted his high regard for the men and women in her convents. Lorenzana attempted to clear her reputation, and tried to focus his criticism on the doctrine of Teresa’s books, and away from her as a person. His attitude was almost an exculpation. He reminded the inquisitors how Teresa was always humble enough to submit her claims to the opinion of *letrados*, and how she was excused from any wrongdoing (Llamas 446).¹²² In a way, Teresa’s rhetoric of humility was doing its work by excusing her from any guilt in the eyes of Lorenzana, even despite the fact that he considered her ideas as heterodox and dangerous.

For the accuser, Teresa’s attitude of submission to the Catholic Church exempted her from charges of being a deceiver. But as his text progressed, Lorenzana became more and more severe in his attacks against Teresa, to the point that his accusations can no longer be compatible with the claim that she was not a deceiver. He started by denouncing the falsehood of Teresa’s claims that it was God who inspired her to write her autobiography. He followed this denouncement by a long passage, most of it in Latin, where he quoted ecclesiastical sources to argue that Teresa was reproducing heresies which contradicted the sense of the Holy Scriptures. His tone is that of an emphatic academic, and it contrasts dramatically with Teresa’s rhetoric of doubt. Lorenzana openly declared that Teresa spoke of things that she did not understand, and of which she knew nothing: “Other things are contained in these books of Teresa of Jesus that came of her own

¹²¹ “Yo no quiero, ni es mi intención poner mácula en la persona de Teresa de Jesús, antes la tengo por virtuosa y buena mujer, porque pasó muchos trabajos en fundar una tan buena Religión y salió con ello, y hanse visto muy buenos efectos de esta fundación.”

¹²² “En los comienzos de sus libros . . . los sujeta no sólo a la Iglesia, sino al parecer de hombres doctos. Y fue mujer humilde que no se confió de sí en hechos y dichos de su doctrina, sino que lo comunicó con hombres doctos, y así ella queda excusada con Dios y con los hombres.”

intellect, and although she was intelligent and of good understanding, she got into many things that she did not comprehend, nor did she know what she was saying” (Llamas 447).¹²³ Her ignorance, in fact, will become a powerful argument in her favor, for it will be used by Lorenzana to excuse Teresa for incurring into heterodox errors.

Lorenzana considered that theological knowledge took priority over Teresa’s spiritual experience. The many sources he quoted, including Paul, Augustine, Jerome, Origen, and Thomas of Aquinas, among others, served the purpose of rendering Teresa’s experience as inferior to his vast theological erudition, and to the unquestionable authority of such sources. Paradoxically, this delegitimation of Teresa’s spiritual experiences is followed by Lorenzana’s concession that only the true spirit of God could inspire the reforming enterprise undertaken by Teresa. The accuser is then forced to establish a clear distinction between Teresa the foundress, and Teresa the writer. The former, in his view, was guided by an authentic divine inspiration. The latter, on the contrary, was instigated by the devil: “That she may have had some divine instincts to do and say some things, is very credible . . . but she did not have divine instinct to write what she wrote” (Llamas 447-8).¹²⁴ Lorenzana did not provide any explanation or justification for this duality, nor did he consider the possibility of contradiction, given that Teresa justified many of her reforming efforts on the basis of divine revelation. Lorenzana simply created an abyss between Teresa’s reforming project and her description of her own spiritual experience. The origin of the first was divine while the second was demoniac.

For Lorenzana, Teresa was deceived by the devil. He used the term in a straightforward claim in which he also stripped away all of her legitimacy as a spiritual guide: “One who has been

¹²³ “Otras cosas se contienen en estos libros de Teresa de Jesús, que salieron de su propio ingenio, que aunque era aguda y de buen entendimiento, metióse en muchas cosas sin entenderlas, ni saber lo que decía.”

¹²⁴ “Que haya tenido algunos instintos divinos para hacer y decir algunas cosas, es muy creíble . . . pero, instinto divino para que escribiese lo que escribió, no le tuvo.”

deceived so many times, thinking that it was God speaking to her when it was the devil, can only give a bad rule or method to know when God speaks interiorly to the soul or when it is not His words” (Llamas 448).¹²⁵ Furthermore, for every time Teresa contradicted the Scriptures, no matter how irrelevant her claims were, the accuser disproved her by quoting profusely from other biblical passages. Some examples of this were Teresa’s assertion that after the ascension of Jesus he never returned to earth to speak to anyone else; or her idea that after Jesus resuscitated he went to see his mother, for she could no longer bear staying away from him. For Lorenzana, these doctrinal errors proved that Teresa was deceived by the devil. Like De la Fuente, Lorenzana was incapable of doubting himself, and his confident attitude stands in dramatic contrast with Teresa’s doubts. To top off his argument, Lorenzana resorted to Saint Paul’s mandate that women should not be allowed to teach, and added that Teresa would do well in taking Paul’s advice. Interestingly, Lorenzana did not find the same incompatibility between Paul’s dictum and Teresa’s reforming project.

Lorenzana iterated the inadequacy of Teresa’s claims in the face of the doctrine of the Catholic Church. And his remarks became more forceful when he got into the matter of the suspension of the powers. In *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa described mental prayer as divided into four levels, the highest of which she called the prayer of union. At this high level of prayer, she stated, occurred the suspension of the powers: memory, will, and intellect. When the soul is in union with God, she argued, it is He who rules these powers, and the mystic is unable to exert any control over them (*Life* 18.12). Lorenzana considered this idea as dangerously heretical, and Teresa’s explanation of her theory on the prayer of union as a revelation from God alarmed him. Lorenzana’s words acquired a bitter and almost sarcastic tone as he tried to unveil what he

¹²⁵ “Mal puede dar regla y método de conocer cuándo habla Dios al alma interiormente o cuándo no son sus palabras quien tantas veces se engañó, pensando que la hablaba Dios y le hablaba el diablo.”

considered as the real intention of Teresa's theory of prayer: "These doctrines all come from Blossius; and so Teresa of Jesus does not have to sell them to us as if they were doctrines of God, saying that God was always her teacher" (Llamas 457).¹²⁶

The fact that Lorenzana used the verb *vender*, "to sell," suggests that he perceived in Teresa the purposeful intention of deceiving. He accused her of trying to pass as a revelation from God what evidently was a heretical claim. At this point it becomes very difficult to reconcile Lorenzana's interpretation of Teresa's active intention to deceive with his initial statement that the Carmelite was a good woman whose reputation he did not want to taint. Perhaps this is why, right after this strong allegation, Lorenzana backed down and clarified that he did not think Teresa really meant to utter such heresies. He resorted to Teresa's theological ignorance as a justification for her deviations from orthodoxy. He dismissed some of Teresa's assertions on the role of the powers as *disparates y locuras*, "nonsense and follies," made with no science or reason (Llamas 465). But precisely by justifying Teresa's errors as ignorance, Lorenzana diminished the gravity of his accusations, and attenuated the charges of heresy against her. Despite his dismissal of Teresa's statements as nonsense, he insisted on the danger of such doctrine, and continued to identify the fragments of Teresa's works where she repeated these problematic statements. He located the passages where Teresa declared her doctrine to be a revelation from God, and argued, after refuting her with theological sources, that such revelations were indeed coming from the devil. The accuser finally concluded that Teresa must have been possessed by the devil (Llamas 460).

One of Teresa's most problematic statements, according to Lorenzana, was her explanation of the prayer of quiet (*oración de quietud*).¹²⁷ Teresa stated that at this level of prayer, *letras* were

¹²⁶ "Estas doctrinas todas son sacadas de Blossio; y así no nos las tiene que vender Teresa de Jesús por doctrinas de Dios, diciendo que Dios le fue siempre maestro."

¹²⁷ Teresa defined the prayer of quiet as the second level of prayer (*segundo grado de oración*). See chapter 15 of Teresa's *Book of Her Life*, and especially 15.10.

not really necessary. She specifically advised her confessors on the problem of hindering their own spiritual progress when reaching the prayer of quiet by focusing their attention on theological precepts, rather than letting themselves feel the presence of God. Teresa even argued that, at this point, knowledge was more an obstacle than an aid. She recommended her readers to feel humble in the presence of God, and to acknowledge the futility of intellect in the face of Divine Wisdom (*Life* 15.8). Lorenzana found these claims contradictory and erroneous. According to him, Teresa's statements implied that theology was useless: "This equals to say that the Holy Scripture is useless, I mean, the science of it" (Llamas 466).¹²⁸ He argued that her statements placed her doctrine above that of the Holy Scriptures, which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and quoted a number of biblical sources to support his allegations.

Lorenzana was especially upset by how Teresa characterized her relation with her confessors. He was displeased at her intention of teaching them, and what was worse, at their disposition to be taught by her. The accuser made a general disapproving remark on this issue, but he specifically criticized Teresa for addressing her confessor by calling him "son." In her text, Teresa explained that she did so only because his humility was such that he had insisted on it. This gratuitous explanation indicates her capacity to predict the problems that would arise if zealous theologians read her books. Lorenzana was one of them. He considered Teresa's reference to her confessor as "son" an arrogant fault: "it is arrogance and lack of modesty and inurbanity and lack of humility to call her confessor son" (Llamas 459).¹²⁹ His remarks point at his opinion that Teresa was infringing the instituted hierarchy of confessors and penitents. Unlike De la Fuente, who directed a strong criticism to Teresa's confessors, Lorenzana focused on the Carmelite and

¹²⁸ "Esto es decir que no sirve la Sagrada Escritura, digo la ciencia de ella."

¹²⁹ "Es arrogancia y poca modestia y inurbanidad y poca humildad llamar hijo a su confesor."

maintained that she should not have accepted her director's request to be called "son." He disregarded entirely the fact that Teresa owed obedience to her confessor's requests.

One of the most interesting parts of Lorenzana's document is his admission that he would not judge some of Teresa's doctrinal errors because she wrote hyperbolically and moved by love: "I want to excuse a saying that, by itself is an error, and I would not excuse it in any other place of the many I have quoted along this entire censure, because here, Teresa is speaking hyperbolically and, seemingly, with the force of love" (Llamas 468).¹³⁰ Lorenzana thus became the first in a long line of Teresa's readers to state that she wrote at times as in a rapture, imbued by her love of God, and perhaps unaware of the doctrinal errors that she was making, precisely for being overtaken by the power of emotions. This claim would be sustained for centuries, and would only be thoroughly addressed and fully contested by Alison Weber's work.¹³¹ The commendation of Teresa's so-called "feminine style" derives from the idea that she wrote overtaken by love. But by delineating an image of Teresa, the writer inspired by the love of God, Lorenzana ended up arguing in her favor. The Teresa who wrote overtaken by love for God, challenged the other Teresa, who was a deceiver or a victim of the devil's deceit. This image also contradicted Lorenzana's previous claim that Teresa was not writing inspired by God, for let us recall that he had said "she did not have divine instinct to write what she wrote" (Llamas 447-8).

Moreover, Lorenzana continued to point at Teresa's lack of theological training as an explanation for her deviations from orthodoxy. For him, her outrageous errors were the consequence of plain ignorance (Llamas 461). He meticulously explained, for example, that Teresa confused the functions of the powers, attributing to the will what was done by the intellect, or to

¹³⁰ "Quiero yo excusar un dicho que de suyo es error y no lo excusare en otro lugar de cuantos he citado en toda esta censura, porque aquí va Teresa hablando hiperbólicamente y al parecer con fuerza de amor."

¹³¹ For an account of the tradition of scholars who defend the idea of Teresa's feminine style, see Alison Weber's *Rhetoric*, especially chapter 1. See also footnote 7 of the second chapter of this dissertation.

the intellect what was done by memory. He concluded that such heterodox doctrine was a destruction of “theology and philosophy, sciences that determined infinite truths” (Llamas 461).¹³² But the opinion that Lorenzana had of Teresa’s ignorance was also ambiguous. While he recognized her lack of formal education as an exoneration of blame for her heterodox claims, he also made Teresa responsible for the obliteration of theology and philosophy, which he regarded with obvious admiration. Lorenzana hesitated on the extent to which he should hold Teresa responsible for her heterodoxy. Only at the end of his accusatory *memorial* he finally decided to release the person, not the doctrine, from guilt: “The person alone, not the doctrine, is excused” (Llamas 460).¹³³

However, Lorenzana’s conflict of placing the full blame of heresy on Teresa or exonerating her was never really resolved. The accuser did not completely embrace the idea that Teresa was a deceiver. In comparison, De la Fuente assumed a significantly tougher position and made harsher accusations against Teresa, whom he portrayed as an *alumbrada*. Lorenzana was not willing to go that far. He worked hard to separate the doctrine from the person, and the writer from the foundress. This separation reveals that Lorenzana was not fully convinced that Teresa was a deceiver, and he was more willing to defend the idea that she was deceived by the devil. He also warned that Teresa’s deception could continue to do harm if her books were to circulate freely among the devil’s easiest prey: women. But ultimately, Lorenzana’s inability to fully defend or condemn Teresa might have contributed to undermining the idea of Teresa as a malicious deceiver.

¹³² “Esta doctrina . . . solo destruye las ciencias Teología y Filosofía, que infinitas verdades determinan”

¹³³ “Sólo se excusa, no la doctrina, sino la persona.”

Juan de Orellana: Although They Gravely Err, They Shall Do Miracles

According to Llamas Martínez, Juan de Orellana was a young and prestigious Dominican friar when he met Teresa. In his first letter sent to the Inquisition about Teresa's case, Orellana claimed that he had thought of her as a very religious and Christian woman, who wanted to do good, and who sought competent confessors who could guide her (Llamas 434-5). Just like Lorenzana, he warned his readers that his criticism was directed against the doctrine, rather than at the person of Teresa. But unlike Lorenzana and De la Fuente, Orellana did not write to the Council of the Inquisition out of his own desire to judge Teresa's works, or as Lorenzana had declared, to unburden his conscience.¹³⁴ Instead, Orellana was requested by the Inquisition to read and judge De la Fuente's documents in 1591. By this time, Orellana had earned a reputation for being an excelling theologian. He had taught at some of Spain's most prestigious schools, and had become the *calificador* of the Spanish court (353-4).¹³⁵ His reply to this request is surprisingly brief. Llamas Martínez explains that Orellana might have considered De la Fuente's *memoriales* as sufficient response to the demands of the Inquisition. Orellana limited his verdict to the reiteration of De la Fuente's estimations, and relinquished the possibility of finding new or different threats in Teresa's works.

Orellana reprobated Teresa's idea about various degrees of prayer, as well as her method of progressing through them until reaching spiritual union with God. He considered her teachings wrong and heretical. Furthermore, Orellana subscribed to the idea that Teresa's doctrine was dangerous because it could deceive lay people, especially women: "This doctrine is an occasion

¹³⁴ Lorenzana's first letter to the Inquisition, dated on June of 1593, requested the prohibition of Teresa's books. He justified his request by claiming to have found numerous heretical ideas in Teresa's works, and, consequently, decided to bring the matter to the Holy Inquisition's tribunals so that he could unburden his conscience: "[Para que] yo descargue el escrúpulo de mi conciencia" (Llamas 444).

¹³⁵ Orellana taught at both Colegio de Valladolid and Colegio de Ávila. It was during his term as professor at the latter that he met Teresa. See Llamas Martínez, p. 353. It is also important to note that all information on Orellana provided by Llamas Martínez is taken from the work of Beltrán de Heredia, published in 1947.

for many, especially women, to be deceived by the devil transformed in an angel of light” (Llamas 434).¹³⁶ It was certainly not the first time that a theologian considered Teresa’s work to be misleading and unsafe, particularly to women. Before Orellana, De la Fuente, Lorenzana, and even her anonymous defender, repeated the opinion that Teresa’s writings posed a potential threat: either women could be deceived by thinking they had similar raptures to those of Teresa, or they could falsely claim to experience supernatural phenomena to deceive others. The religious atmosphere of sixteenth-century Spain was prolific in visionary women, some of whom turned out to be renowned deceivers. The underlying sentiment of theologians who found danger in Teresa’s works seemed to be that women who ventured into the realm of religion were to be suspicious: they inevitably posed the danger of deception.

Orellana ended his letter by mentioning only in passing, almost accidentally, that what made matters more delicate was that Teresa claimed to have received her doctrine as a revelation from God. The sentence is less than two lines long, but despite its brevity, it opens the door to the grave accusation of Teresa’s deception. Indeed, the part of Teresa’s writings that deserved the harshest reprehension, in Orellana’s opinion, was her claim that all of her ideas on prayer had come directly from God. If such a claim was reprehensible it could only mean that, for Orellana, Teresa was either falling prey to an illusion (originated either by her imagination or the devil) or she was outright lying. This last sentence provides an important contrast with Orellana’s initial assertion that he had always held Teresa to be a very Christian and virtuous woman. The fact that the accuser set the ground for the possibility of deception reveals that his opinion of Teresa might have been a lot more nuanced and ambiguous than what he admitted it to be. Right after this loose but

¹³⁶ “Es ocasionada esta doctrina para que a muchos, señaladamente, mujeres, los engañe el diablo transfigurado en ángel de luz.”

powerful statement, Orellana requested the inquisitors to prohibit Teresa's written works; a request that remained ignored.

Orellana was not the only theologian that the Council had sought to judge De la Fuente's opinions of Teresa. The Agustinian Antonio de Quevedo had been entrusted with the same task. Llamas Martínez does not provide any information on this prominent theologian who built the most extensive defense of Teresa before the Inquisition that we know. Quevedo had read the accusations against Teresa prepared by De la Fuente and Orellana. He meticulously addressed each of their claims and defended the orthodoxy of Teresa and her doctrine. Unlike the anonymous defender, Quevedo did not find any threats in the works of Teresa, and he even recommended its reading to everyone, including laymen and women. Quevedo claimed to trust that Teresa's visions and raptures had indeed a divine origin, and he abstained from judging them as the product of deception. Because of his take on prayer and on spiritual experiences, Teresa would have likely considered him as part of the group of *espirituales*.

After Quevedo and Lorenzana presented their opinions, the Inquisition requested Orellana again for his comment. In this second letter, Orellana fully backed Lorenzana and endorsed him by reminding inquisitors that Lorenzana had personally met Teresa and had always expressed admiration for her reform. The accusatory remarks by Lorenzana, according to Orellana, could only stem from true religious zeal. This new document addressing Teresa's texts as well as Lorenzana and Quevedo's opinion of them is longer and more detailed than his first letter. Orellana began his second *memorial* where he had finished his first: Teresa's claim that God had directly inspired her doctrine. This time, Orellana reserved a big part of his text to the analysis of what he considered the most problematic part of the writings of Teresa: "It is a heretical, diabolical, and pernicious blasphemy, the fiction of heretics of old and of our times, to authorize their heresies"

(Llamas 471).¹³⁷ In his opinion, it was already reproachable that people would proudly present heretical ideas as a product of their reasoning and logic, but only the very worst of heretics, including Luther, would attribute to God a false and erroneous doctrine. He placed Teresa among this latter group.

For Orellana, Teresa was untrustworthy; her doctrine was the product of her own invention, and she lied when she attributed it to God, just like *alumbrados* and other heretics did. Given that her doctrine was wrong and misleading, God could not be the author of it, and therefore, she had to be lying. It was indeed a very serious charge. At this point, Orellana stood far from his original claim of not wanting to taint Teresa's reputation. In this second *memorial* he portrayed her in a way that could hardly be reconciled with the "very religious and Christian woman" he had described in his first letter. The image that he had carved of the pious Teresa could not counterweigh the allegations he presented against her in his second document. But Orellana measured his words, because as he established comparisons between Teresa, Luther, and *alumbrados*, he stopped short of directly calling her a deceiver. For instance, he rejected the condition of Teresa as a prophet and visionary, by arguing that God's prophets spoke only the truth. The implication being that Teresa was a liar, but Orellana refrained from explicitly calling her that.

Just like Lorenzana, Orellana was also deeply offended by the way in which Teresa wrote about theological knowledge: "she conceded very little to *letras*" (Llamas 472).¹³⁸ He echoed Lorenzana's notion of Teresa's disdain for theology, but the accusers carefully belittled, rejected or ignored Teresa's numerous expressions of admiration for theology, and her lifelong determination to have as confessors only the most celebrated theologians that she could find.¹³⁹ In

¹³⁷ "Es blasfemia herética, diabólica, perniciosísima y ficción de herejes antiguos y de nuestros tiempos, para autorizar sus heregías."

¹³⁸ "Bien poco concede a las letras por cierto."

¹³⁹ These expressions are found throughout Teresa's works, but see especially Chapter 13 of *The Book of Her Life*.

the previous chapter, I explained that Teresa understood *letras* to be a tool that could help believers distinguish between sin and virtue, and as such, they were a useful compass on the spiritual path. But Teresa also emphasized the insufficiency of *letras* as a way to know or experience the divine. For her, prayer was the only true path to God (*Life* 19.13). Orellana and Lorenzana reproached Teresa for what they saw as conceding more importance to prayer than to theological knowledge. From this, they concluded that Teresa disdained *letras*.

The paradox was that, as a woman, Teresa had only limited access to theological knowledge. Resorting to mental prayer was an obvious option for women who wanted to pursue spiritual development. In this context, Teresa's position regarding *letras* was complex. As discussed in the previous chapter, gender was a powerful variable involved in the regulation of access to knowledge. Teresa had to negotiate with her confessors the knowledge she received from them and the limits of its application to her raptures. An important example of Teresa's skills in negotiating access to knowledge was her take on the issue of discernment of spirits. She stated that only "humble and virtuous *letras*" (*Life* 34.11) could be an effective instrument for theologians to recognize whether their penitents' experiences were authentic or not.¹⁴⁰ Demons, Teresa added, fear humble knowledge. This assertion combines her avowal of the important role of *letras* in discerning true from false raptures with the demand to her confessors for a more moderate use of such knowledge. The humility to which she refers is nothing other than the prudence she asked from *letrados* before they judged as demonic all spiritual experiences that their penitents claimed to have.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ "Letras humildes y virtuosas."

¹⁴¹ On this matter, it is important to recall Teresa's subversive claims in chapter 25 of *The Book of Her Life*: "I do not understand these fears: devil, devil!, where we could say, God! God!, and make the devil shake . . . It is that, without a doubt, I fear more those who fear the devil so much than the devil himself; for he cannot do anything to me, but they, especially if they are confessors, can disturb greatly, and I have spent some years of such great trouble that I am now surprised at how I was able to endure it" (*Life* 25.22).

Orellana and Lorenzana both protested what they saw as Teresa's disdain for theology, and they interpreted her attitude as an attempt to invalidate their credentials. In a way, their behavior would have turned them into examples of what Teresa considered as unhumble *letras*. Orellana contended that Teresa's categorization of prayer as superior to theology meant that she was not giving any credit to the *letrados* she consulted with, and that in the end, she only followed her own judgement: "The Mother did not give any credit to the experimented learned men more than that which she gave to her prayer. And so, she with her spirit was the last resolution in being fearful or certain, and no one who had experience could move her to think anything other than what her own spirit moved her to think" (Llamas 474).¹⁴² For Orellana, Teresa was using her repeated claims of consulting with *letrados* merely as a rhetorical strategy to avoid suspicions from her superiors. In the end, however, she subjected to the authority of her own judgement and to the conviction of the authenticity of her experiences. Orellana identified the spiritual experience itself as Teresa's sole prerequisite to assess her doctrine of mental prayer; she conceded little, if anything, to *letras* (Llamas 475).

Alison Weber reached a similar conclusion in her study of Teresa's rhetorical strategies, and specifically in her analysis of *The Book of Foundations*. Weber brought to light the extraordinary ability that had Teresa to take advantage of the cracks and fissures in ecclesial authority, and her capacity to conceal or reveal information, at times even in flagrant disobedience of her superiors, if she considered it convenient. Weber concluded that Teresa ended up obeying solely those superiors who deemed her raptures as legitimate, or "whose will coincided with her own" (*Rhetoric* 133). Her obedience was a matter of convenience, and Orellana, being a

¹⁴² "La Madre no daba más crédito a los letrados experimentados del que ella por su oración entendía. Y así ella con su espíritu era la última resolución en tener temor o seguridad, y nadie podía que tuviese estas propiedades ni diese más crédito que su espíritu le ponía y daba."

remarkably attentive reader, identified this behavior in Teresa. Her convenient obedience could have meant that the Inquisition might have also needed to investigate her confessors and superiors. Those men had received harsh criticism by Lorenzana, but Orellana preferred not to meddle in this issue. He only devoted a few lines to oppose Teresa's claims on how *letrados* could be better arbiters of supernatural experiences by being humble and accepting the importance of prayer. The accuser dismissed the nun's arguments by considering them an unacceptable disregard for theology.

For Orellana, the doctrine on prayer taught by Teresa was not only wrong, but it defied logic. For him, Teresa was contradicting the most basic arguments of intellectual reason when she talked about the role of powers during spiritual raptures. Lorenzana had already addressed this problem, and had explained how Teresa's ideas contravened theological doctrine. Orellana intervened to back his colleague, but he took the issue further and weighted in to describe Teresa's claims as plain absurdity: "As this doctrine is unintelligible, the ones deceived with it want, above all things, to take away understanding from everyone else" (Llamas 480).¹⁴³ Orellana acknowledged the difficulty of accusing a person widely considered to be holy, but despite the anxiety that derived from being in this position, he declared his work as part of that of lettered men (*hombres doctos*), who wanted nothing other than to defend the truth of the Catholic faith. Admittedly, theological knowledge was precious to him. His insistence on tackling the issue reveals the unrest that caused him what he judged was Teresa's dismissive opinion of theology.

Orellana's criticism of the mystical doctrine taught by Teresa served two purposes. In the first place, he rendered her entire spiritual experience as anti-rational, by establishing the illogical consequences of her explanation of prayer. He belittled her knowledge and concluded that she

¹⁴³ "Como esta doctrina es ininteligible, los engañados con ella quieren ante todas cosas quitar a todos el entender."

either ignored or disdained theological premises. Secondly, he returned to the idea of deception, and suggested that the unintelligibility of Teresa's ideas was a threat to those who possessed knowledge. The ones deceived by her doctrine, he argued, were so wrong that they wanted to take away reason from those she hadn't reached yet. This argument was the platform from which Orellana requested the Inquisition to ban Teresa's books, since her written work became the vehicle to propagate her deceiving tricks. And just like Lorenzana, Orellana retreated after having laid the ground for his accusations of deception against Teresa. After discrediting her teachings as nonsense, Orellana proceeded to exculpate Teresa, claiming that he was convinced that she was deceived by the devil: "I undoubtedly have Mother Teresa . . . as deceived by the devil, but she was not intentionally or purposefully a deceiver. But if her works are not forbidden now, her books will be deceivers, although not on her account (Llamas 482).¹⁴⁴

Orellana's position with respect to Teresa was unclear. He argued that she was a false prophet, and suggested that she lied when she defined her method of prayer as the product of divine revelation. But just as he prepared his arguments to accuse Teresa of deception, he backed down and attributed her doctrinal errors to her condition of victim of the devil's deceit. The implication of this was that Teresa was not a deceiver herself. Orellana was acutely aware of Teresa's growing popularity, and of the diffusion of her reputation for holiness. In light of the seriousness of his accusations against her, the growing cult around Teresa, and particularly the rumors about her incorruptibility may have stopped him short of directly charging her with deception. Orellana knew that opposing Teresa was unpopular, and perhaps even questionable. In different parts throughout his letter, he acknowledged the risks of requesting the Holy Inquisition to forbid the books written by a person considered by many to be a saint: "It may seem to some that it is a hard thing to forbid

¹⁴⁴ "A la Madre Teresa . . . sin ninguna duda, la tengo por engañada del diablo, mas no fue de intención y de propósito engañadora. Mas, si ahora no se vedan sus obras y libros serlo han los libros, aunque no a su cuenta."

the books of a person regarded as holy, and through whom God has made many miracles” (Llamas 483).¹⁴⁵

Although Orellana admitted the precariousness of his position, he justified his accusations against Teresa. He conceded that he had heard stories about miracles attributed to Teresa’s intervention, but he insisted on casting doubt over the orthodoxy of her doctrine. Orellana questioned the authenticity of the miracles attributed to Teresa, and he challenged their alleged divine origin. He also considered the possibility of an unknown natural cause as a perfectly acceptable explanation for her body’s incorruptibility (Llamas 483). He then recalled the renowned case of María de la Visitación, a celebrated visionary nun and stigmata who was later discovered to be a fraud. A group of inquisitors paid María a visit and they did several tests to verify the authenticity of the stigmas she carried in her hands. The tests resulted in María’s full confession of how she forged the stigmas, and other tricks she did to foster the idea of her holiness (Imirizaldu 177-99). Orellana compared María and Teresa, and he reminded the inquisitors that even a prestigious theologian such as Fray Luis de Granada could be deceived by these women. Granada wrote *Historia de Sor María de la Visitación*, an extensive defense of María and a thorough account of the miracles attributed to her. Orellana then suggested a new comparison, this time between Granada and Father Francisco Ribera, author of the first biography of Teresa.¹⁴⁶ Orellana warned that his were not times to believe blindly in apparent miracles, and recalled that if it had not been for the Inquisition, people would have continued to believe in María’s alleged holiness (Llamas 483).

¹⁴⁵ “Podría parecer a alguno que es recia cosa vedar los libros de una persona tenida por santa y por quien Dios ha hecho tantos milagros.”

¹⁴⁶ See Francisco de Ribera’s *Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesús*.

However, after having set up his arguments and after questioning Teresa's holiness, Orellana retreated once more. He stopped to entertain the possibility that the miracles attributed to Teresa were legitimate, and he stated his hopes that they turned out to be authentic. But even in that case, he argued, the miracles would not validate the doctrine taught in Teresa's books. Rather, Orellana understood these miracles to be proof of God's mercy towards those who sincerely sought Him, no matter how deceived they were. In setting up this argument, Orellana asserted the likelihood of Teresa's holiness, but firmly maintained the rejection of her doctrine. His argument is constructed in a way that so clearly emphasized the idea of deception that it is worthy of a reproduction:

[The miracles] were not made to corroborate the bad doctrine that is found in her books, but for God Our Lord to demonstrate that when a person consults with *letrados* about her conscience and *letrados* reassure her, even if they were deceived, and however they were deceived, be it with or without fault of their own, if the person that consulted with them tried to know the truth, although she may be deceived either by the understanding of *letrados* or by the devil, if those she consulted with tell her it was an angel of light, and as such she venerates and honors it, then she deserves for God to come back for her, and as testimony of her holiness, she may make miracles and be canonized . . . so that the devil be confused, and so that he sees that he can do little, even with those who deceive their understanding as continually as this Mother did, and even with those who venerate and hear and obey him through this deception as if he were God, when the will is righteous and it abhors the devil, and only loves the figure of light in which he is transformed. And also God does this to teach men to consult their conscience with those who are learned, for if they err while consulting, although they gravely err, they shall do miracles and be canonized . . . And so, the Holy Inquisition can heed no attention to how many true miracles that the author has made. (Llamas 484-5)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ "No fueron hechos [los milagros] en comprobación de la mala doctrina que en sus libros hay, sino para demostrar Dios nuestro Señor que cuando una persona consulta a los letrados sobre su conciencia y los letrados la aseguran, aunque ellos se engañen, como quiera que ellos se engañen con culpa suya o sin ella, si la persona que los consultó trató de saber la verdad, aunque ella sea engañada cuanto toca al entendimiento por los letrados y por el diablo, que le dicen los que consultó que es ángel de luz, y por tal ella le venere y honre, merece que Dios vuelva por ella y que en testimonio de su santidad haga milagros y sea canonizada . . . para confusión del demonio, que vea él cuán poco puede aún con los que engañan su entendimiento tan continuamente como a esta Madre, y le veneran y oyen y obedecen por este engaño como a Dios, cuando la voluntad es recta y le aborrece en sí mismo y sólo ama en él la figura de luz en que se transforma. Y también hace Dios esto para enseñar a los hombres que consulten su conciencia con quien sabe; pues cuando yerren consultando, aunque gravemente yerre, harán milagros y los canonizarán . . . Y así, la santa Inquisición no haga caso de cuantos verdaderos milagros hubiere hecho su autora."

This extract is a good summary of Orellana's opinion of Teresa and other visionary women. His explanation for the potential authenticity of Teresa's miracles is a complicated structure that refused to give in to the idea of Teresa's orthodoxy. It is also a dialogical explanation of deception and knowledge as two opposing forces. Deception originated in the devil, while knowledge came from God, and was embodied by *letrados*. He described knowledge as remedy and antidote for deception. In this paragraph, Orellana used five times the word *engaño* (deception), and three times *letrados* (educated men). Ultimately, he placed the good will of those who search for God as superior to deception. Even if the devil deceived Teresa and the *letrados* she consulted, even then, Orellana affirmed, God could perform miracles through her, for she had a good will. The miracles attributed to Teresa, he added, were God's testament to the importance of consulting with knowledgeable men. And although visionary and confessors may be deceived, God would grant his mercy to those with good intentions, and they would do miracles and even be canonized (Llamas 485).

In the end, Orellana rendered *letras* as more important than miracles. He exhorted the Inquisition not to heed the claims of Teresa's miraculous interventions, but rather to focus on regulating the orthodoxy of her doctrine. While Orellana vehemently insisted on the heretical nature of Teresa's teachings, he refused to label her as a deceiver, and chose to suggest, instead, that she was deceived. Among the many grave accusations Orellana directed at Teresa were the implication that she lied when she claimed her way of prayer was the product of divine revelation, and her false pretention to be a prophet. Moreover, Orellana expressed discontent for Teresa's opinion about *letras*. As he acknowledged in his letter to the Inquisition, he was thoroughly aware of Teresa's growing popularity, and particularly of the attention given to her incorrupt body. This

may have become a good reason why he preferred to direct his accusations exclusively against the doctrine of Teresa, while sparing her from any personal or moral charges.

Francisco de Pisa: Offended by Her Visions

According to Llamas Martínez, Francisco de Pisa (1534-1616) arrived some years late to the debate on Teresa's works. In 1598, five years after the last letter sent by Orellana to the Inquisition, Pisa wrote to the tribunals arguing the need to unburden his conscience after having read Teresa's texts. He shared the same motivation as Lorenzana and De la Fuente, and stated that "for the unburdening of his conscience" he was compelled to accuse the doctrine found in the works of Teresa (Llamas 486).¹⁴⁸ Pisa was a secular cleric who held important positions within the prestigious bishopric of Toledo. He was also a historian and a renowned theologian. A doctor on Canon Law, Pisa was, among others, dean of Theology at the University of Toledo (Llamas 383). His stature as a scholar turned him into a powerful adversary of Teresa. Pisa argued that her beliefs contradicted the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and were closely tied to those of *alumbrados* (Llamas 486). Moreover, he set up the connection between Teresa's ideas and the concept of deception, as he contemplated the possibility that, by reading her books, ignorant laypeople as well as the friars and nuns in Teresa's reformed convents could be deceived.

Pisa was brief and concise in his letter, but he made sure to note the references, including page number, to what he viewed as the most problematic sections in Teresa's works. He made a list of Teresa's doctrinal points which he thought were confusing or erroneous, although he refrained from commenting on them. The list of falsehoods and errors included Teresa's mention that a person can be certain of when he or she is doomed; her claim that the devout soul can

¹⁴⁸ "Por el descargo de mi consciencia."

understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity; Teresa's way of prayer, and specifically her interpretation of the roles of the powers during prayer, among others (Llamas 486). The list goes on for a few paragraphs, but Pisa did not present theological arguments to invalidate Teresa's doctrine. After listing her heterodox claims, Pisa moved on to criticize her visions and raptures. He declared that he was offended by the many revelations Teresa wrote about: "I am offended by the account of many revelations, visions, and miracles that she tells about herself" (Llamas 486).¹⁴⁹ The supernatural phenomena that Teresa described included the privilege of knowing those who went to heaven and those who went to the purgatory, and knowing the degree of glory of those in heaven. Once again, Pisa did not comment on Teresa's assertion, but he stated that, even though she claimed to have written in obedience to her confessors, she was really using the argument of obedience to defend and justify herself.

An attentive reader of Teresa, Pisa took notice of her use of the rhetoric of obedience to defend from potential accusations, particularly in connection to visions and raptures. Pisa was able to trace some of Teresa's contradictions in her declarations of obedience. He pointed out that, as she professed undisputed subjection to her superior's mandates, she simultaneously refused to believe them when they considered her visions to have a diabolic or imaginary origin. Pisa noted that Teresa "sometimes did not follow the opinion of *letrados* and confessors with whom she consulted, and followed her own judgment instead" (Llamas 486).¹⁵⁰ He based his argument on a quotation extracted from Father Ribera's biography of Teresa, in which she argued that, even if all the *letrados* and saints told her otherwise, she could not help herself but believe that her visions came from God.¹⁵¹ This contradiction in Teresa's attitudes towards obedience, according to Pisa,

¹⁴⁹ "Oféndeme en relatar sus muchas revelaciones, visiones y milagros que de sí propia cuenta."

¹⁵⁰ "A veces no seguía el parecer de los letrados y confesores con quien ella consultaba, antes seguía el suyo propio."

¹⁵¹ I was able to find this quote from Teresa in *Tesoro de escritores místicos españoles*, directed by Eugenio de Ochoa: "But, whenever I am in prayer, and the days during which I am quiet and thinking of God, even if all the *letrados* and

posed a double threat: on the one hand, it allowed for potential misreadings by devotees who might want to seek visions and raptures, therefore becoming prey for the devil's deceit; on the other, it implied that Teresa had no respect for theological knowledge or ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The first threat was determined by the connection that Pisa established between Teresa and deception. The accuser considered that Teresa's emphasis on visions and revelations may open the door for other people who sought spiritual growth to procure such phenomena, which could lead to deception by the devil. Pisa noted that not all were trained in the discernment of spirits, and therefore it could be dangerous to pursue the path of prayer taught by Teresa. His argument derived into a strong call for the Inquisition to ban Teresa's works. The second threat originated in Teresa's impossibility to abide by what her confessors told her if it contradicted her own feelings, wishes, or convictions. Teresa openly expressed her incapacity to consider her visions as anything other than a revelation from God, despite what her confessors and superiors thought. Pisa considered Teresa's willingness to dismiss her confessors' opinion as her lack of respect for their formal training, and as her prioritizing of mystical experience over theological knowledge.

Just like Lorenzana and Orellana had done before him, Pisa expressed great discomfort with the idea of an unlettered woman acting as a spiritual teacher: "And ultimately, these books contain the doctrine of an unlettered woman" (Llamas 486).¹⁵² The argument of the unlearned woman was enough for Pisa to discredit Teresa's ideas on prayer and spirituality. But he also discharged her confessors, explaining they could only give her advice. Pisa claimed Teresa was too stubbornly convinced of her own ideas, and too opinionated with regards to her spiritual

saints that are in this world get together and give me unimaginable torments, and even if I wanted to believe it, they could not make me believe that this is the devil, because I can't. And when they wanted to make me believe it, I feared, because I saw who was saying it and thinking it, and I thought they had to say the truth, and that I, being who I was, had to be deceived. But at the first word, or recollection, or vision, everything they had said to me came undone, and I could not resist it, and I believed it was God" (372). Teresa makes very similar statements throughout *The Book of Her Life*, particularly in chapters 27-28.

¹⁵² "Y al fin estos libros contienen doctrina de una mujer sin letras."

experiences. The accuser reinforced his argument with the expected reference to Saint Paul's mandate of women's silence. He claimed that Teresa's texts should be banned from translation and circulation, and suggested devotees to seek other pious books where they could learn about spirituality without this grave risk of deception (Llamas 487).

However, just as he was finishing his letter, Pisa recognized the righteousness of Teresa, whom he described as "virtuous and a good religious woman, and a servant of God, who is praised by the Supreme Pontiff, Sixtus V" (Llamas 487).¹⁵³ In a similar fashion to what we have seen in Lorenzana and Orellana, Pisa made sure that his accusations were directed to Teresa's doctrine, rather than to her as a person. In fact, he dedicated a full paragraph to the recognition of her virtue and that of the order she founded, which he described as very saint and exemplary. Furthermore, he contended that Teresa erred because of ignorance, and not because of malice (Llamas 487). His mention of the great admiration of Pope Sixtus V, who approved the constitutions for the orders founded by Teresa, could also be an indication of Pisa's awareness of the growing reputation of holiness that surrounded Teresa.

Conclusion

For Teresa's accusers, several of her propositions on spirituality and her accounts of visions and raptures posed the threat of deception. These men worried that her books could lead other believers, and particularly women, to being victims of the devil's tricks. The idea of deception was so central in their letters to the Inquisition, that it became the basis for their justification to request the banning of Teresa's written works. But no matter how clear their position was regarding her books, their opinions became increasingly ambiguous when it came to Teresa as a person. Alonso

¹⁵³ "Virtuosa y buena religiosa y sierva de Dios, y que es alabada por el Sumo Pontífice Sixto V."

de la Fuente and Juan de Orellana were arguably the harshest of her accusers. They each criticized her for attributing to God what they considered were her own ideas, and accused her of a convenient obedience to her superiors. De la Fuente's *memoriales* suggested he thought of Teresa as an *alumbrada*, and along with Orellana, he strongly denounced her visions and raptures, which they believed to be either tricks from the devil or fabrications of her own imagination. But despite their strong claims, all four of the accusers stop short of calling Teresa a deceiver. In their attempts to accuse the unorthodoxy of her doctrine, they concluded that she was deceived by the devil, rather than a deceiver herself.

The consolidation of the image of Teresa as deceived instead of deceiver may have been, at least in part, influenced by her growing reputation of holiness. Francisco de Pisa presented the last of these accusatory documents to the Inquisition in 1598, only 16 years before her beatification. Moreover, in 1585, three years after Teresa's burial, news started to spread about her incorrupt body. Devotees began to report numerous accounts of miracles attributed to her, which included apparitions, healings at the touch or sight of her body and garments, among others. By the end of 1585, even King Philip II, a long-time admirer of Teresa, had weighed in on the issue (Eire 439). Undoubtedly, in this context, accusing Teresa of unorthodoxy was not an easy task, and her accusers were profoundly aware of the unpopularity of their judgement. It is not possible from the evidence of the accusatory texts alone to conclude that Teresa's reputation of holiness was the determining factor in the decision of the accusers to hold her as deceived rather than as deceiver. However, it is very likely that the growing pressure for her beatification and canonization was an incentive to soften charges against her.

Given the unpopularity of the accusers' position, it is important to question their insistence on taking Teresa's written works to the tribunals of the Holy Inquisition and pushing for their

banning. After all, Teresa's accusers were among the most prestigious and distinguished theologians of sixteenth-century Spain. So why would this select group of knowledgeable men press for banning the books of a nun who had been the foundress of a revered order, and whose body was being displayed as miraculous and irrefutable proof of her holiness? In all likelihood, Teresa's works genuinely concerned them, not only for her challenges to orthodoxy, but for her subversive embrace of prayer over doctrine, and of personal experience over theological knowledge. Teresa pushed the limits of her subordinate position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and contested the authority of *letrados*, among others, by attributing her raptures and visions to God; by making God the ultimate legitimate arbiter of her supernatural experiences; by conveniently submitting to those superiors whose mandates coincided with her own will; and finally, by teaching.

Teresa's defense of the authenticity of her visions and raptures, even when contradicting her superiors' opinion left her in a difficult position. The accusers interpreted some of her assertions as contrary to the Holy Scriptures and to the established ecclesial hierarchy. The accusers understood Teresa's visions to be either the product of women's feeble imagination, physical weakness, or the work of the devil. Nevertheless, Teresa's work as foundress, the rumors about her incorruptibility, the many miracles attributed to her, and the support of her influential allies, were strong elements that weakened the idea of Teresa as deceiver. Instead, the four accusers used their theological training to try to prove that she was deceived by the devil. Her lack of *letras* and her womanhood strengthened the image they carved of Teresa as victim of the devil's deceit. In their letters, accusers consistently pointed to theological knowledge as antidote for deception. Visions and raptures, on the other hand, were the vehicles for it. Teresa's ambiguous position about

letras further pushed the theory that she was deceived, for she lacked the theological training that could have saved her from the devil's tricks.

There is no evidence of any response sent by the inquisitors to the accusers. Llamas Martínez has concluded that this institutional silence suggests the Inquisition was favorable to Teresa, and the fact that General Inquisitor Gaspar de Quiroga was a friend of hers supports this hypothesis (343). However, it is difficult to determine why Teresa's case ended in silence. No decision was made, and she was never trialed, neither condemned nor absolved. Perhaps Teresa's case benefitted from the influence of Quiroga and other important members inside the clerical higher ranks, or from her allies among the nobility, or even from the intervention of King Philip II. All of these variables may have played a role in the outcome of her case at the Holy Office's tribunals.¹⁵⁴ In the next chapter, I address precisely the question of how these variables came together to Teresa's benefit by comparing her case with that of another visionary woman, her contemporary, Francisca de los Apóstoles. Unlike Teresa, Francisca was condemned by the Inquisition after a long trial that revolved around the idea of deception. This comparison also illuminates both the effects and limits of the rhetoric of deception.

It is doubtful that there will ever be enough evidence to understand why Teresa's case at the Inquisition could not come to a definitive conclusion. But it is important to notice that, for almost a decade, Teresa's works were discussed and evaluated by the most prestigious theologians of the time. There can be no doubt as to the impact her work had in the religious thought of Counterreformation Spain. Her rapid canonization is an enticement to question how Teresa's image shifted from deceiver to deceived and, finally, to saint. Deception was, after all, the best

¹⁵⁴ See part II of Llamas's work, especially pages 127 and 343. For Teresa's relation with key figures of the Spanish nobility (some of whom played a crucial role in her successful reform and encounters with the Inquisition), see Weber's "Saint Teresa's Problematic Patrons."

card that *letrados* could play to defend the legitimacy of theological knowledge, and to regain control of the religious discourse in the face of the challenges posed by visionary women, such as Teresa and Francisca.

CHAPTER 5. FRANCISCA DE LOS APÓSTOLES AND THE FAILURE OF THE RHETORIC OF DECEPTION

In the previous chapters, I have identified Teresa of Avila's rhetorical strategies and assessed their effect on the theologians who accused her of being either a deceiver or deceived. The accusers expressed their apprehension over the legitimacy of her spiritual experiences, but the doubts they voiced were stifled after Teresa's canonization in 1622, only 40 years after her death. Ultimately, Teresa proved to be very successful at convincing religious authorities of her abidance to the opinion of *letrados* and her submission to the Catholic Church. Her sophisticated use of rhetorical strategies, particularly those that I have termed her rhetoric of deception, became crucial to prevent and alleviate suspicions against her. Although the first formal accusation of deception presented to the Inquisition in 1589 portrayed Teresa as a deceitful woman, over the course of the following years, her image would transform from deceiver, to deceived, and finally to a saint.¹⁵⁵ Teresa's success in challenging her image as deceiver made it possible for ecclesial authorities and for the general public to consider her visionary activity as authentic.

But despite its effectiveness, Teresa's rhetoric of deception alone cannot be credited for her success. One of the biggest challenges in assessing the effects of her rhetorical strategies is the impossibility of isolating those effects from the social and historical elements that helped to consolidate her image as an authentic visionary. Teresa's canonization sanctioned her legitimacy as receiver of God's gifts, and it was the result of a complex combination of variables: i) a network of powerful allies among members of the nobility and the ecclesial hierarchy; ii) her collaboration with male counterparts; iii) the prestige of her reforming project; iv) the support from the monarchy;

¹⁵⁵ Teresa's journey from deceiver to deceived is discussed in chapter 3. This process of transformation ended with her remarkably quick canonization. In comparison, contemporaries John of the Cross and Francis Borgia were canonized, respectively, 135 and 98 years after their deaths.

v) the many miracles attributed to Teresa, together with her uncorrupted body; vi) the manipulation of her image, including her masculinization, to fit the ideal of sanctity; and vii) the Church's validation of mysticism as part of its Counter-Reformation agenda. Arguably, all of these elements, together with Teresa's effective rhetoric of deception, help to explain the unequivocal success of the Carmelite, the Church's corroboration of the authenticity of her visionary activity, and her emergence as one of the most important saints in Catholicism.

For this final chapter, I have resorted to a different methodological approach, which allows me to further understand how the combination of Teresa's rhetorical strategies with her socio-historical context came together to determine her final success. To do this, I have established a comparison between Teresa and another visionary woman, Francisca de los Apóstoles who, unlike the Carmelite, was condemned for religious deception. Francisca was Teresa's contemporary, and she also claimed to receive supernatural gifts. In fact, Francisca's visions were similar to those of Teresa, and she also aspired to be a religious reformer. But Francisca was tried and condemned by the Inquisition, and her story remained forgotten for centuries. The comparative approach that structures this final chapter seeks to illuminate the reasons behind the different endings that Francisca and Teresa reached. As I explain in the following pages, some of the nuances of Teresa's successful strategy in defense of her visionary activity appear more clearly when contrasted with Francisca's failure to justify her accounts of supernatural experiences.

For research on this chapter I consulted the original manuscript of Francisca's inquisitorial trial housed at the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid. The *legajo*, just short of 300 folios, contains the testimony of 26 witnesses, the inquisitor's interrogation of Francisca, the prosecutor's accusation, and Francisca's defense. There are also some loose leaf papers, among which the spiritual vows that Francisca wrote to offer herself as an instrument for the atonement of the

world's sins are of special interest. Other documents include a schedule of weekly prayers (apparently written by Francisca's confessor, Miguel Ruiz), five letters that Francisca wrote to her sister Isabel Bautista who travelled to Rome, and another letter she sent to Pedro Chacón, a priest and close friend involved in her reforming project. These loose pages were likely gathered as evidence by the Inquisition at the moment of Francisca's arrest, and they constitute the only documents known to us that she wrote.

Unlike Teresa, Francisca was neither a teacher nor a prolific writer. Besides the vows and letters, she claimed to have written the now-lost constitutions for the convent of women that she intended to found.¹⁵⁶ A witness also claimed to have seen her hide and later burn some papers with the account of her visions, but it is not clear if those pages were the letters that Francisca had sent her sister Isabel or an entirely different document.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the similarity between the kinds of writings Francisca and Teresa produced is remarkable, and it is a testament to their common identity as visionaries and religious reformers.¹⁵⁸ Like Teresa, Francisca was familiar with religious women's accounts of their spiritual life and visionary experience, often known as *relaciones de espíritu* (Giordano 60). She declared that she had read Catherine of Siena's story. It is not unlikely that the account of her visions, if indeed it existed in a format other than the letters

¹⁵⁶ Francisca's testimony is contradictory. While she initially claimed to have written the constitutions (*regla*) for the convent that she intended to found (fol. 54r), she later declared that her sister Isabel Bautista was the author of the constitutions (fol. 172r). This confusion on who is the writer of the constitutions also appears in the official accusation made by the prosecutor (fol. 204r).

¹⁵⁷ The references to these writings are vague and unclear. Witness María de Jesús y Jiménez said that Francisca, knowing she would be visited by the vicar, hid "a big bundle of papers" in a wooden box, which she later buried. Days after the visit, Francisca took out the papers and burned some of them (fol. 63r-v). When the inquisitor interrogated Francisca about this episode, she replied that she had given the papers to her confessor Miguel, who said there was nothing to hide (fol. 171r). María de Jesús described some of the documents as letters (*cartas*), perhaps indicating the letters Francisca wrote to her sister Isabel. But the description of a "big bundle of papers" (*gran bulto de papel*) points towards the possibility of an entirely new text, unknown to us.

¹⁵⁸ Teresa wrote many letters regarding her project of reform, along with constitutions destined to structure religious life in her newly found convents, as did Francisca. Also, Francisca's letters to Isabel contain descriptions of her spiritual visions that are not dissimilar to those we find in Teresa's *Book of Her Life*. Finally, the vows written by Francisca and some of her replies during her inquisition contain a theory on the discernment of spirits that is very close to the one developed by Teresa in some of her writings.

sent to Isabel, could have been an attempt to write the story of her spiritual life, very much in the style of Teresa's *Book of Her Life*. However, since the body of her written work is considerably short, for the present study I will rely mostly on Francisca's oral responses to the inquisitor's interrogation, and on her letters.

The Story of Francisca de los Apóstoles

Beltrán de Heredia appears to have been the first to write about Francisca de los Apóstoles. He mentioned her in passing, as did decades later Álvaro Huerga, as part of a larger work on *alumbrados* and other Spanish heretics. Both described Francisca unfavorably, as a fraud or as possessed by the devil.¹⁵⁹ Ahlgren noted that the remarks made by these men indicate that neither had thoroughly read the manuscript of Francisca's trial.¹⁶⁰ Rosa Rossi also mentioned in passing Francisca's case, but she highlighted the political aspect of her reforming project.¹⁶¹ In 1999 two short studies that relied on the manuscript of Francisca's trial were published. The first is an article by Maria Laura Giordano, who echoes Rossi's suggestions of the essential political implications of Francisca's reform.¹⁶² The second one is a chapter written by Gillian Ahlgren and published in Mary E. Giles' celebrated *Women in the Inquisition*. It was the prelude to Ahlgren's final study of

¹⁵⁹ See Beltrán de Heredia, "Un grupo de visionarios y pseudoprofetis que actúa durante los últimos años de Felipe II," especially pages 489-95; and Álvaro Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados*, vol. 1, especially pages 232-33.

¹⁶⁰ See Ahlgren's footnote 3 on her introduction to *The Inquisition of Francisca*. Heredia's reading of Francisca's trial is biased and incomplete. He seems to have only read the testimonies of a few *beatas*, and his account is primarily focused on the testimonies of the priests that initially supported Francisca or the accusations compiled by the inquisitor. He never considered Francisca's declarations.

¹⁶¹ Rossi construed Francisca's reforming efforts as an "organized campaign" to obtain the liberation of the then imprisoned Archbishop Bartolomé de Carranza. This interpretation is a bit of a stretch, in my opinion. Francisca did side with Carranza and defended his innocence, but her claims could hardly constitute an organized campaign for his liberation. See *Teresa de Ávila. Biografía de una escritora*, p. 124. The role of Carranza in Francisca's case is described in the following pages.

¹⁶² Giordano confuses Isabel Bautista's name in Rome, Isabel de San Jerónimo, with a friend of Francisca. The article also reaches some imprecise conclusions on the role of Pedro González de Mendoza, a connection that Francisca and Isabel had in Rome. Don Pedro was apparently in direct communication with Carranza, and according to him, the imprisoned Archbishop had learned and approved of Francisca and Isabel's project to found two reformed monasteries. Don Pedro's role is discussed further ahead. See fols. 178r-v.

Francisca's case, published in 2005 with the title *The Inquisition of Francisca*. The book features an introduction with a thorough analysis of the historical and religious context of sixteenth-century Toledo, along with a justification of the importance of Francisca's case. It is the first work on Francisca that includes a partial translation of her trial, and her letters and vows. Ahlgren's book remains the most complete study of Francisca de los Apóstoles to date.

Four days after her arrest on October 1, 1575, Francisca appeared before the tribunal of the Inquisition in Toledo. She was summoned for her initial examination, and began to tell her story (fols. 169r-195v). According to her declaration, she had spent most of her life in Toledo, although she was born in the neighboring town of Novés, probably around 1539. Her mother had died during Francisca's early childhood, and perhaps as a result of this death, her father had moved to Madrid and Francisca was put in a community of *beatas* at the church of Santa María la Blanca, in Toledo. This is a relevant fact, because unlike Teresa, Francisca never joined a religious order, nor did she ever become a nun. As a *beata*, Francisca was stuck in the paradoxical position of simultaneously enjoying relative freedom from the control of an immediate religious authority, while also having trouble proving that she remained obedient to ecclesial powers. In general, *beatas* during the late sixteenth century became suspected of heresy and unorthodox practices precisely because they lacked supervision.¹⁶³

Francisca had three brothers and two sisters, all of whom would come to support her religious activity. Francisca's father and two of her brothers were painters, who specialized in painting retables. Ahlgren has pointed out the likelihood of Francisca's *converso* origin, positing

¹⁶³ Ángela Atienza López has problematized some of the assumptions generally made in the historiography of *beatas* and *beaterios*. She has argued that not all *beaterios* were without supervision, and many of them were founded with the purpose of later becoming convents that were part of a religious order. Atienza López has demonstrated that *beaterios* were more heterogeneous than previously thought. See "De beaterios a conventos." During her trial, Francisca mentioned how they were visited by the vicar.

as evidence both the artisanal family occupation, along with her inability or unwillingness to name her grandparents during the interrogation (Apóstoles 12). Although these two arguments make a case for a possible *converso* background, there is no conclusive evidence to prove one way or the other and, as expected, Francisca declared during her trial that she descended from *cristianos viejos*, old Christians (fol. 169v). At around the age of twenty-five, Francisca moved out of Santa María la Blanca to live with her siblings. She claimed that during this time she devoted herself to teaching the poor maidens in the city how to sew, so that they could earn a living and thus avoid the need to depend on unwanted marriages or even prostitution (fol. 171r).¹⁶⁴ This is the first expression in Francisca's declaration of her concern for social justice. Her compassion for the poor, especially, would become a cornerstone of her religious reform project and her spiritual visions.

In Toledo, population growth, bad economic measures, and ecclesial corruption had resulted in widespread sickness and poverty (Ahlgren 121). The situation only worsened with the imprisonment of Archbishop Bartolomé de Carranza, whose policies had been focused on providing relief for the poor.¹⁶⁵ Throughout her trial, Francisca not only showed great admiration for Carranza, but she also considered his imprisonment as a terrible injustice. She blamed the corruption of the clergy. She bitterly denounced priests who hustled to amass fortunes while being indifferent to the suffering of the most vulnerable population. Her attitude was bold, to say the least. In one of her most dramatic visions, Francisca said she saw Saint Peter asking God to punish

¹⁶⁴ In the original: “. . . y tenía entendido el camino por donde se perdían muchas doncellas y mujeres que andaban perdidas, se empleaba en recoger algunas y enseñarles labor que sabía.” English translations of quotes or paraphrases of extracts from the manuscript of Francisca's trial are my own. They appear in the main body of the text with corresponding folio numbers. The original quote in Spanish is provided in the footnotes without reference. I have updated old forms of spelling that do not alter meaning to facilitate reading.

¹⁶⁵ For a very short time Carranza was Archbishop of Toledo, the most important ecclesial position in Spain. He was arrested in 1559 and was tried by the Inquisition on the grounds of heresy, particularly for alleged heresies in his *Commentary to the Catechism*. His trial lasted for almost 17 years, and his absence allowed King Philip II to appropriate some funds of the archbishopric. For more on Carranza see: José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras, *El arzobispo Carranza y su tiempo*; and John Edwards, “Experiencing the Mass anew in Mary I's England: Bartolomé Carranza's ‘Little treatise.’”

clerics, arguing, “I was naked and I followed one who was naked, while they [the priests] are laden with income and vice” (fol. 175v).¹⁶⁶ It is remarkable that Francisca did not show any signs of fear or reluctance to express these harsh reproaches of the clerics’ behavior, even in the midst of her own inquisition.

When Francisca was living with her siblings and helping the town’s maidens, her sister Isabel Bautista started to show signs of what many thought to be either a mental illness or demonic possession. She was exorcised various times, resulting in the worsening of her condition. Isabel was seen wandering through the streets alone, aimlessly, and the family was worried. Following the advice of neighbors and friends, Francisca took Isabel to Miguel Ruiz, a priest known for having a more gentle approach to these kinds of ailments. He prescribed prayer and daily communion and within a week Isabel was fully recovered. The swift recovery boosted Isabel’s religious devotion, and she soon engaged in fasting, penance, and prayer. Isabel exhorted her siblings to do the same and Francisca eventually followed suit. After a while, Isabel decided to travel to Rome, on her own, to obtain the papal approval for a convent that she intended to found. She left on All Saint’s Day in 1573, to the dismay of her siblings and the people of Toledo.

During Isabel’s absence, Francisca started to visit Miguel more frequently. He was chaplain at Hospital de la Misericordia, a place that Francisca often visited to attend mass. It was around this time that she started to report having spiritual visions. In her first rapture, Francisca saw the Virgin Mary begging her son to forgive the clergy for their many sins. Mary asked Jesus to allow Bartolomé de Carranza to become the Pope of a new and reformed Church (fol. 173r). In her second vision, Francisca described a very angry God, offended at the sinfulness of humanity and ready to destroy an unredeemable world. The Virgin, Jesus, and some of the saints tried to placate

¹⁶⁶ “. . . y luego vio venir a San Pedro diciendo delante de aquella majestad ‘Padre eterno, duro castigo sea sobre los sacerdotes que tan mal os han seguido, porque yo desnudo seguí al desnudo y ellos van cargados de rentas y vicios.’”

God's wrath to no avail. Jesus then turned to Francisca and asked her if she would allow the demons to torment her by showing her the ways in which they had propelled people to sin and offend God. Francisca doubted. She asked for time to think about it, and it was then that she came across Catherine of Siena's story. Catherine, a fourteenth century mystic and stigmata who was canonized in 1461, had endured the pains inflicted on her by demons, so as to atone for the sins of the world. Francisca found in Catherine's story the motivation to finally accept the divine offer (fol. 173v).¹⁶⁷

Francisca was tormented by demons who talked through her to Miguel Ruiz. They presented themselves and explained how they tempted humanity, while causing Francisca great physical and emotional pains. The demons represented different sins, such as pride, lust, greed, etc. In response, Francisca vowed voluntarily and in writing that she committed herself to live every day of her life in exercise of the virtues opposed to those sins (humility, chastity, selflessness, etc.).¹⁶⁸ In a way, Francisca was casting herself as a scapegoat that atoned for the sins of the world, which was problematic to the inquisitors because it effectively raised her "to the position of the saints" (Ahlgren 128). Francisca was placing herself in a category of holiness equal to that of Catherine of Siena, and the inquisitor considered this attitude as bold and prideful. Not only did he construe the episode as demonic possession, but moreover, he concluded that Francisca's story could only be the result of either pride or the weak female nature. She was either a deceiver or had been possessed and deceived by the devil. I will analyze this particular exchange between Francisca and the inquisitor further ahead, in light of the use each one of them makes of the idea

¹⁶⁷ Francisca must have read Raimundo de Capua's *Vida de la bienaventurada sancta Catharina de Sena*, published in Spain in 1569. According to Francisca's own account: "esta confesante . . . acertó a topar con en el libro de Santa Catalina de Siena un capítulo que trata cómo vio semejantes demonios y que ella pidió que viniesen sobre ella y así fue muy atormentada de ellos por la Iglesia de Dios, y de ahí tomó esta confesante atrevimiento y osadía a determinarse y dijo a Nuestro Señor que todo lo que a su honra y de su iglesia conviniese que ella lo aceptaba de buena voluntad todo lo que Su Majestad quisiese determinar con que le diese su gracia para que nunca le ofendiese."

¹⁶⁸ In the manuscript, the vows appear as loose leaflets and are numbered fols. 158r-162v.

of deception. But it is significant that the inquisitor cannot consider Francisca's account outside the scope of the idea of deception.

Francisca described a great sense of spiritual peace once the demons were done tormenting her (fol. 175r).¹⁶⁹ But after a while, the visions resumed. Francisca saw the Passion of Christ, while she heard a voice that repeatedly asked, "Who will satisfy the injustices made to the Lord?" (fols. 176r-177v). She then saw a procession of nuns, and God said, "These are the religions that I want to satisfy me in the same way as you have vowed" (fol. 177r). God commanded her to found two monasteries; one for nuns and one for monks. Twelve men and twelve women in the monasteries were to renounce material possessions and live a religious life. Shortly after the time of these visions, Isabel returned from Rome without the Pope's license, but she now had the full support of Francisca, who was determined to found the monasteries. The sisters appealed to Sancho Busto de Villegas, the appointed governor of the archbishopric of Toledo, who oversaw religious affairs in the city after Carranza's imprisonment, asking for his permission to found the monasteries. Isabel also went to Madrid and presented a petition to the King. The King referred the matter to the Consejo and the Consejo sent it back to the governor who denied the license because, in Francisca's words, "there was scandal about it in the city" (fol. 178v).¹⁷⁰ We do not know the nature of this scandal, but it is likely that the people of Toledo were not oblivious to Francisca's visions and Isabel's trip to Rome and her exorcisms.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ "Dijo que . . . se le acabaron a esta confesante estos modos y peleas de los demonios en que esta tuvo victoria contra ellos y sintió gran paz y sosiego en su alma."

¹⁷⁰ "La dicha Isabel Bautista se vino por Madrid y dio una petición al rey pidiéndole que mandase al gobernador le diese esta licencia y el rey lo remitió al Consejo y el Consejo Real lo remitían al gobernador. Y porque había sobre ello escándalo en esta ciudad, no dieron licencia al gobernador." The inquisitor indicated the scandalous nature of Francisca's visions. During her interrogation and referring to her visions, he noted that "the entire city is filled with these your things." In the original in Spanish: "Toda la ciudad está llena de estas cosas tuyas." See fol. 189^{bv}.

¹⁷¹ According to the witnesses, Francisca's visions were disruptive, with episodes of shouting and fainting. See fols. 63r-68r and 94r-100v.

The sisters rented a house anyway and moved to live there with a group of women, some of whom were Miguel's penitents. Their intention was to live as a community of *beatas* while they worked out a way to obtain the license. From the manuscript, it is likely that Francisca and Isabel saw as imminent the foundation of the monasteries, perhaps in connection to a miraculous release of Carranza from prison. The sisters expected that if Carranza were to be reinstated as Archbishop of Toledo, he would wholeheartedly support their reforming project.¹⁷² In her declaration, Francisca even suggested that don Pedro González de Mendoza, their contact in Rome during Isabel's attempt to have an interview with the Pope, was in communication with the imprisoned archbishop. She said that don Pedro had promised Isabel that he would make sure that upon Carranza's liberation, they would be granted the license to found the monasteries (fols. 178r-v).¹⁷³

The idea of the monastery of men also started to gain traction. Miguel would be in charge of leading the male monastery, but other priests were getting increasingly involved in the project. Two of them, Marcos de Porras and Alonso López de la Cuadra, agreed to travel to Rome once again to try to obtain the Pope's license. All of them were aware of Francisca's visions, and there is no evidence that they expressed any concerns about her authenticity as visionary until much later, when the Inquisition intervened. At first, López de la Cuadra's enthusiasm was extraordinary. He claimed that twenty-seven years before he met the sisters, he had dreamt of the monasteries they were trying to found. He even declared he had recognized Isabel from his dream. This initial excitement contrasts with his attitude during the interrogation by the inquisitor, when López de la

¹⁷² See, for example, the testimony of Magdalena de San Francisco: “. . . Francisca, hermana de la dicha Isabel y otras mujeres, trataba de rogar a Dios que sacase de prisión al arzobispo de Toledo porque decían que había de dar renta para fundar ciertos monasterios” (fol. 11r).

¹⁷³ “Estando la dicha Isabel Bautista en Roma le dio alguna más noticia por cartas a esta confesante de esto del monasterio, enviándola a decir que trataba con don Pedro González de Mendoza . . . y que le había dado cuenta del intento que llevaba sobre lo del monasterio, y que el dicho don Pedro González le había dicho que si el arzobispo salía, como lo esperaban todos, que él haría que le otorgase lo que ella pedía y favorecería a su intención.”

Cuadra acknowledged he had been deceived by the devil.¹⁷⁴ Miguel, who had endorsed Franciscas's visions and who was committed fully to her reforming effort, also showed signs of disillusionment (*desengaño*) when the Inquisition got involved. According to the account of one of the witnesses, a priest named Pedro Chacón, Miguel had said to the sisters, after finding out that the inquisitor was investigating them, "Sisters, I think we have been wrong, because we have had one revelation from God and three from the devil" (fol. 111v).¹⁷⁵

Magdalena de San Francisco, a *beata* in Francisca's religious community, provided an explanation for the initial excitement around Francisca and Isabel and their reforming project. Her reasoning hints at the problem of religious deception. During her declaration before the inquisitor, Magdalena suggested that the group of aspiring reformers was largely inclined to explain spiritual experiences in terms of divine gifts:

Miguel Ruiz and Francisca and Isabel easily believe in whatever happens in their interior, thinking that it comes entirely from Our Lord, and they believe in dreams, and Miguel Ruiz approves of this, saying that in the Holy Scriptures God spoke to some in dreams, and that it is very clearly distinguishable when it is God or the devil who speaks in the interior. (fol. 10v)¹⁷⁶

The ability to distinguish the origin and meaning of spiritual visions, the discernment of spirits, was at the core of Francisca's case, and it proved to be a lot more difficult than Miguel had initially considered. Francisca's visions attracted the attention of many in the city and sparked

¹⁷⁴ In López de la Cuadra's testimony he says: "... a este testigo le sucedió que en una noche le manifestó el demonio todo cuanto había hecho hasta el día en que estaba, y le había manifestado los dos monasterios de clérigos y monjas y la entrada de su criada en aquel monasterio, lo cual le sucedió en sueños y con todo esto entiende este testigo que el demonio es muy grande astrólogo y que puede engañar de muchos años antes que suceda, porque sabe lo futuro en sus propias causas y movimientos de ciclos" (fol. 43r).

¹⁷⁵ Chacón testified that Andrés Cerezo, brother of Francisca and Isabel, had heard Miguel Ruiz make this heartbreaking acknowledgment to the sisters, when it was obvious that the Inquisition was investigating them: "Hermanas, yo creo que habemos andado errados porque habemos tenido una revelación de Dios y tres del diablo."

¹⁷⁶ "Miguel Ruiz y la Francisca y Isabel . . . creen con gran facilidad lo que interiormente se les ofrece, entendiendo que es enteramente de Nuestro Señor y creen en los sueños y el Miguel Ruiz lo aprueba diciendo que en la Santa Escritura se dice que Dios hablaba a algunos en sueños, y que muy claramente se conozca cuando es Dios el que interiormente habla y cuando es el demonio."

controversy. But I would argue that the situation of the *beaterio* became even more unstable when the self-proclaimed prophet friar Juan de Dios became associated with Francisca and her reforming enterprise.¹⁷⁷ It is not clear how or when Juan met Francisca, but his appearance could have prompted the *beata* Catalina de Jesús to inform the Inquisition on what was happening at the house. Catalina presented the first denunciation against Francisca to the Inquisition tribunal in Toledo in a written declaration on November 19th, 1574. Hers is an account of Juan's prophecies, which Francisca held to be true. Francisca had told Catalina and the other *beatas* that Juan believed the end of times was near. According to him, the following year of 1575 would see the destruction of three fourths of the world population, and a Christian prince would come to rule the world. Francisca was to play a starring role during those times, and it was essential that she found the monasteries where religious men and women would help to placate the Lord's wrath for the sins of the world (fols. 2r-v).

Catalina resented the fact that Francisca held Juan's prophecies as divine revelations, but it is noteworthy that she did not mention Francisca's visions to the inquisitor. This failure to describe the *mercedes* that Francisca allegedly received suggests that what sparked the apprehension of Catalina was Juan's extravagance, rather than Francisca's visions.¹⁷⁸ But Catalina's denunciation did not immediately unravel an investigation. After that, it took almost an entire year for the Inquisition of Toledo to proceed with a formal process against Francisca, Isabel, and Miguel.¹⁷⁹ This delay in inquisitorial action was fairly common. Ahlgren has thoroughly

¹⁷⁷ For more information on Friar Juan de Dios see David Coleman's *Creating Christian Granada*, especially pages 130-137.

¹⁷⁸ Catalina didn't provide many details regarding Juan's problematic assertions. López de la Cuadra, for instance, testified that Juan professed to be better than Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Juan also claimed that he had the power to cure the ill with his saliva, which, he said, was the color of a blue sky. More problematic yet is his assertion that he had been imprisoned by the Inquisition in Córdoba, but that the inquisitor had set him free after his prophecies proved true. See fols. 43v-45v.

¹⁷⁹ Although only Francisca's trial has survived, annotations on the margins of the manuscript indicate that Isabel and Miguel were also incarcerated and tried by the Inquisition. There is no definitive evidence of their conviction, but it

documented the exchange of communication between the Inquisition's Tribunal of Toledo and the Inquisition's Supreme Council in Madrid.¹⁸⁰ The exchange was filled with instructions from Madrid on how to take the appropriate procedural measures. Juan de Llano de Valdés, the inquisitor of Toledo, would be in charge of overseeing the entire trial, and of interrogating Francisca.

One month after Catalina's declaration, another witness, Luisa de Aguilera, denounced Francisca to the Inquisition (fols. 4r-7v). Luisa was the mother of María de Jesús and Isabel de Rincón, two of the *beatas* at Francisca's house, and thus, possibly an endower of the reforming project. On her deathbed, Luisa confessed to the Jesuit Sebastián Hernández that she felt uneasy about some sinful things that Francisca had said. Luisa gave a thorough description of Francisca's visions, but this time there was no mention of Juan de Dios. Hernández went to the Inquisition and passed on Luisa's testimony and accusations. Between January and September of 1575, six other *beatas* came forward with denunciations. A handful of priests also testified, including Miguel Ruiz; Sebastián Hernández, as he had confessed accuser Luisa de Aguilera; Alonso López de la Cuadra; and the aristocrat Don Gaspar de Mendoza. Doña Leonor de Mendoza, his sister, had apparently heard about Francisca's intention to found a convent, and allowed her maid María de la Paz to join the *beaterio*.¹⁸¹ María, Don Gaspar, and Doña Leonor all testified that Francisca and Isabel asked

makes sense to assume they were condemned along with Francisca. Interestingly, there is no evidence of an inquisitorial trial against Juan de Dios, even though the witnesses in Francisca's case denounced him of serious heretical statements.

¹⁸⁰ Ahlgren has explained this delay as a combination of variables: the lengthy and thorough procedures at the Inquisition; the need for a more reliable witness, namely a priest; the lack of theologians who could evaluate the case; the excessive amount of work by the tribunal in Toledo; and the Toledan inquisitor's initial thought that the case was irrelevant or unrelated to matters of heresy. See *The Inquisition of Francisca*, especially pages 15-7.

¹⁸¹ In her declaration, María de la Paz suggested that when she learned about the monastery that Francisca and Isabel were trying to found, she communicated her wish to enter it to doña Leonor. Interestingly, María also mentioned don Pedro González de Mendoza as one of the supporters of the *beatas*, which could indicate that there was some kind of family tie between don Pedro and doña Leonor that perhaps María tried to use as leverage to fulfill her desire to join the *beaterio*. However, I have not been able to find conclusive evidence of this alleged family tie. For María de la Paz's declaration, see fols. 26r-29v.

Doña Leonor to sponsor the founding of the monasteries by donating a house, food, or money. Increasingly doubtful of the reputation of the *beata*, Doña Leonor consulted with her brother who, upon learning about Francisca's visions, quickly advised her not to found the monastery, and Doña Leonor withdrew her patronage (fols. 26r-29v).

Overall, these first witnesses presented a remarkably consistent account of Francisca's spiritual visions. They point to her support of Carranza and her criticism of the corruption of the clergy. Their testimonies reveal that her project to found the monasteries was a direct consequence of her perception of religious communities in Toledo as corrupt, greedy, and immoral. The witnesses' declarations also suggest that they thought of Francisca as either a deceiver or deceived by the devil. Just like Miguel Ruiz and Alonso López de la Cuadra, some of the *beatas* confessed their early support of Francisca, and how it evolved into disappointment and the fear of having been deceived.¹⁸² On the first day of October of 1575, Llano ordered the arrest of Francisca.¹⁸³ She would face a trial that would last for over two years, in which a total of twenty-six witnesses would give testimony. Francisca was accused of being either a deceiver or deceived by the devil, and the inquisitor Juan de Llano de Valdés sought to prove it throughout his interrogation. He never expressed any disposition to believe in the authenticity of her visions, and it took Francisca a great deal of time and effort to defend her claims. I now turn to the analysis of her interrogation, in which the very idea of deception takes center stage.

¹⁸² See for example the testimony of María de Jesús Herrera: "no sé cómo oía estas cosas y otras, creo las creía, no sé, ahora me parece que estaba como encantada" (fol. 130vr).

¹⁸³ In the original: "Nosotros, inquisidores apostólicos contra la herética pravedad y apostasía en la ciudad y reino de Toledo y su distrito mandamos a vos, Juan Ruiz de Ávila, alguacil de este Santo Oficio, que luego que este nuestro mandamiento vos fuere entregado en la dicha ciudad de Toledo y en los demás partes y lugares do fuere necesario, prendáis el cuerpo de Francisca de los Apóstoles, vecina de Toledo, donde quiera que lo hallárades, aunque sea en iglesia, monasterio u otro lugar sagrado, fuerte o privilegiado, y así preso y a buen recaudo, lo traed a las cárceles de este Santo Oficio y lo entregad al alcaide de ellas" (fols. 168r-v).

Deception on Trial

Francisca's initial examination before inquisitor Juan de Llano de Valdés began on the 5th of October, 1575. In the following weeks, she told the inquisitor the story of her life, including a thorough description of her spiritual visions. The first time that she ever mentioned the possibility of having been deceived by the devil was ten days into her examination, and she did so in passing, almost as a formulaic expression to obtain the favor of the inquisitor. She was explaining the way the demons had tormented her, and right after finishing, she added that if the demons had made her err and deceived her, she asked God for forgiveness and the inquisitor for merciful penance (fol. 183^av).¹⁸⁴ The response from Llano was to demand that she say everything she knew, as he suspected that Francisca was keeping something from him. But Francisca had described her visions, her reforming project, and even her open criticism of the Church and her desire to see Carranza freed. No new information would come from her, as she was done telling her story. On November 28th, she presented herself again before the inquisitor, saying that she felt sick and lonely, and begging him to let her have some company. Llano was harsh. He ignored her request, insisted that she would say everything she knew, reprimanded her, and sent her back to her cell (fol. 183^dr).¹⁸⁵ The scene is heartbreaking to read. By this point, Francisca had been incarcerated for two months, and it is doubtful that she could have foreseen that she would remain imprisoned for over a year.

A few days later, on the first day of December, Francisca claimed she had recalled other visions that were almost identical to the ones she had described before. They revolved around the

¹⁸⁴ “. . . y que si en este modo de vivir sus pecados que los demonios que han poseído su entendimiento ha errado y engañádola, que ella pide perdón a Dios Nuestro Señor y penitencia con misericordia al Señor Inquisidor.”

¹⁸⁵ “Dijo que no tiene más que decir de lo que tiene dicho, sino suplicar al Señor Inquisidor le dé compañía porque ha muchos días que está enferma de dolor de hígado y que el corazón padece mucho y que con la soledad no puede llevar la vida que tiene, sino es con gran detrimento de su alma y que la noche pasada y otras ha padecido muchos espantos de los demonios y asombros y que no puede sufrir estar sola. Fue amonestada por segunda munición que recorra su memoria y piense en su negocio y diga la verdad. Dijo que no tiene más que decir y que ella lo pensará, y así amonestada fue mandada volver a su cárcel.”

same idea of an angry God, offended by the sins of the world, and particularly by those of clerics. Francisca, Isabel, and Miguel, through their projected monasteries, were to serve an intercessory role to redeem the sins of humanity. But a few days after she had these visions, Francisca added, she felt the knowledge of her own unworthiness, a deep sense of humility, and God's greatness. She heard a voice within that told her she was not enough to satisfy for the sins for which she had vowed to do penance, but God, through his mercy and love wanted to show the world his need for justice (fol. 185r).¹⁸⁶ The inquisitor asked her how she knew that it was indeed God and the Virgin whom she had seen in her visions. He wanted to know how she could tell it was them, instead of a dream or some trick from the devil. The exchange that followed is a discussion on the discernment of spirits, where the idea of deception emerged as a category of disputed power between the inquisitor and the visionary. Francisca was forced to craft, on the spot, a defense of the authenticity of her visions, a discourse that would ensure her authority as visionary without threatening the theological authority of the inquisitor. The interrogation is worthy of a reproduction:

She was told to say how she knows that what appeared to her was Our Lord and Our Lady and the saints, and in what way she saw it was they.

She said Sir, I don't know how to say that, because a soul is then so outside of itself that it cannot understand, nor is there any sense left in its body before it returns to itself, it [the soul] is in awe of how that could be, because it knows, and any creature would also know, its great misery and that it does not deserve these things [visions]. She was told that, according to what she says, it could have been a dream and not a vision as she said, as happens to people who go to sleep every day and dream many things that are not true, nor is there anything more to them than being dreams.

She said she doesn't know what to say to this, but that she surrenders herself to everything that she is told and is willing to be taught in what she is mistaken, so that she can more truly serve God, because of all the things that she has said and confessed that she saw, she does not believe of them nor take from them anything more than what is proper for her to go on the right path and to serve Our Lord . . . and what she says about not believing nor disbelieving is because she leaves it up

¹⁸⁶ "Un día en el mismo Hospital acabando de comulgar . . . sintió en sí un gran conocimiento de su bajeza y una nueva luz de quien Nuestro Señor era, y en habla interior la daban a conocer cómo ella no era nada ni bastante para satisfacer por la más mínima culpa de las que se había obligado, sino que Su Majestad por el grande amor que tenía al mundo, había querido hacer en esto un modelo por donde entendiesen las gentes que quería satisfacer su justicia."

to the will of the Inquisitor, and that whatever he commands she will believe and hold as true as the commandments of Our Lord. (fols. 185r-v)¹⁸⁷

The challenge that Francisca faced was to advance a defense of the legitimization of her spiritual visions in a language that simultaneously conveyed religious authority and submission to the power of the inquisitor.¹⁸⁸ She repeatedly expressed her surrender to Llano's opinion, and she refused to interpret the meaning of her visions, leaving it up to him what to make of them. Nevertheless, she continually held that her spiritual experiences were legitimate *mercedes* that she received, without merits of her own, from God. This line of defense allowed her to stress her humility, as she acknowledged that the visions were divine gifts, entirely independent of her virtue. In a sense, Francisca suggested that her visions were an expression of God's mysterious ways. But her resources to make a thorough justification of her visionary activity were limited. Although inquisition courts cannot be characterized as simply capricious or arbitrary, they did operate on the presumption of guilt, not innocence. The accused were kept in isolation, imprisoned under conditions that could generate psychological and emotional distress. They were entitled to

¹⁸⁷ "Fuele dicho que diga cómo sabe aquello que la apareció era Nuestro Señor y Nuestra Señora y los santos y que en qué lo vio.

Dijo Señor, eso no sé yo cómo decirlo, porque entonces está un ánima tan fuera de sí que no puede entender ni le queda en el cuerpo sentido alguno antes de que vuelve en sí se espanta cómo pudo ser aquello porque a ella y a cualquiera criatura le queda conocimiento de su miseria y que no merece aquellas cosas.

Fuele dicho que según esto que dice, bien pudo ser sueño y no ver cosa ninguna de las que ha dicho como acontece cada día adormecerse las gentes y soñar muchas cosas que a la verdad no son ni tiene más que haberse soñado.

Dijo que no sabe qué decirse a esto, sino que ella se rindiese sujeta todo lo que se le dijere y la enseñasen en lo que fuere errada para que acierte más de veras a servir a Dios, porque en todas las cosas que ha dicho y confesado que ha visto ni las cree ni las debe ver ni toma de ellas más de lo que la conviene para ir por camino recto y para servir a Nuestro Señor . . . y que en lo que dice que ni creía ni descreía es porque lo deja al libre albedrío del señor inquisidor y que lo que la mandare eso tendrá y creará y guardará tan cierto como los mandamientos de Nuestro Señor.

Fuele dicho que para que pueda ser enseñada es necesario que ella diga todo lo que ha creído y entendido de estas cosas y de otras si las ha habido y después que ella enteramente haya descargado su conciencia se le dirá muy particularmente en lo que va errada y el camino que ha de llevar para ir por el de Dios y que así diga todo lo que en ello hay . . .

Dijo que pensará en lo que se le pregunta y a la tarde lo dirá, pues que ya dada la hora y así amonestada fue mandada a volver a su cárcel."

¹⁸⁸ Alison Weber has used the term "double bind" to refer to the dilemma that Teresa of Avila faced when she was commanded to put into writing her spiritual experiences. Teresa, as Weber explained, had no choice but to write what would likely get her into trouble with the Inquisition. If she had disobeyed her confessors' mandate she would have also faced trouble. See *Rhetoric*, pp. 45-6.

disputing charges against them, but they did not know the exact nature of the charges or who their accusers were until very late in the trial. In consequence, many of the accused were forced into a protracted guessing game with the inquisitors, as they tried to figure out the best strategy for defense against an array of possible accusations. In Francisca's case, over twenty witnesses had testified against her. Moreover, her condemnation of the injustice of Carranza's imprisonment, put her on the side of a man suspected of heresy, and she was associated with a larger group of self-proclaimed visionary men and women. Francisca's chances to successfully defend herself were truly never great.

The case of visionary women entailed the discussion of complex theological concepts, in particular the discernment of spirits. But, as a woman, Francisca lacked theological training, knowledge of Latin, and a methodological understanding of the Scriptures. Perhaps because she was aware of the difficulty of her situation, throughout the interrogation, Francisca made sure she touched on key issues that could help her case. For instance, she described her visions as being spiritual, rather than corporeal. This was important because theologians believed spiritual visions were less likely to be manipulated by the devil than physical visions. Francisca also connected them to the communion, as she maintained that the visions and even the torment inflicted on her by the demons generally happened right after she had taken the communion (fols. 186r-v). She aspired to shield those moments of rapture from demonic agency by cloaking them with the divine protection of the holy host. Finally, she described a great sense of peace and love of God that overflowed her after she received her visions, which she interpreted to be proof of their divine origin.

Ahlgren has identified five principles that Francisca indicated during her interrogation to validate the authenticity of her visions: a) Visions were internal, non-corporeal phenomena; b)

Visions filled her with a deep sense of peace and joy; c) Visions made her humble in acknowledging her own unworthiness for receiving spiritual gifts; d) Visions motivated her to pursue virtue; and e) Visions increased love of God and others (Apóstoles 21). These principles are condensed in the responses that Francisca gave to the inquisitor during the *audiencia* of December 1st, part of which is quoted above. During that interrogation, Llano pressed Francisca to explain how she knew that her visions indeed were from God, rather than dreams or fantasies. He remained unconvinced by her initial reason that the visions had happened right after communion, and suggested that even then the devil could find a way to deceive her. Francisca replied that she knew the visions were from God because her spirit was gently enraptured. During the rapture, the senses did not feel anything corporeal and nothing could disturb the soul. The soul fully understood its unworthiness and the reality of what was happening. Then, she would return to herself and find in her soul a great sense of humility, great love of God, the need to be virtuous, and loathe all sinful things.¹⁸⁹

In broad terms, this description encapsulates Francisca's theory of the discernment of spirits. Her response contained the parameters that she abided by to determine the origin and meaning of spiritual visions. What is remarkable is the fact that these parameters are identical to those used by Teresa in her own defense of the legitimacy of her visions. Furthermore, the discourse on the discernment of spirits that each of them crafted was comparable, not only in its

¹⁸⁹ "Fuele dicho que con todo lo que hablado no ha declarado en qué ve ella ser aquello cosas de Dios y no sueño ni imaginación. Que lo diga y declare porque no es bastante seguridad la que ha dicho y declarado en decir que porque le ha acaecido en acabando de comulgar, porque en ese tiempo y antes y en la misma comunión y en todos tiempos, el demonio anda buscando cómo engañar a las personas. Que diga si hay otra razón alguna.

Dijo que echaba de ver que era cosa de Dios y no del demonio lo primero porque se le va arrobando el espíritu con gran suavidad que en ese tiempo los sentidos no sienten cosa corporal ni que perturbe al alma sino todo una grande suavidad y da en entender el alma grandísima luz y gran conocimiento de su bajeza y de que ha pasado lo que se ve, y la persona torna en sí halla en sí gran humildad y gran sujeción para todo lo que toca al servicio de Nuestro Señor, para con gran facilidad obrar todas las cosas de virtud y que da con gran aborrecimiento de todo lo que es culpa y abraza con grande eficacia todas las cosas que son de pena y fatiga por amor de Nuestro Señor y en esta seguridad que quedaba su alma podía entender si era bueno y si era de parte de Nuestro Señor" (fol. 188r).

content but also in its language. Both Teresa and Francisca, for instance, used the word *suavidad*, softness, to describe the beginning of spiritual visions, and the deep sense of peace and joy that came with them.¹⁹⁰ For both visionaries, this softness was a mark of the divine origin of their supernatural experiences. Both of them also tried to separate physical from spiritual phenomena, and thus to separate what happens to the soul from that which happens in the body. Francisca tried to emphasize the non-corporeal nature of her visions, while Teresa spoke of the superiority of spiritual over corporeal visions (*Life* 27.3). And like Francisca, Teresa argued that true humility forced the visionary to acknowledge the *mercedes* received from the divine: “God gives us [spiritual gifts] without our merit, and we must thank His Majesty, for if we do not acknowledge that we receive, we cannot awaken to love” (*Life* 10.4).¹⁹¹

Teresa and Francisca resorted, in order to validate the authenticity of their spiritual visions, to the five principles that Ahlgren has identified, and which resonate with the discourse on the discernment of spirits. I would like to argue here that there is a sixth principle observable in both visionaries: the spiritual visions infused them with the absolute certainty that these experiences were indeed divine gifts and nothing else. It is a sort of tautological claim that, nevertheless, implied a great risk, for it had the potential to categorize Francisca and Teresa as false visionaries or *alumbradas*, who declared that their spiritual experiences were from God.¹⁹² Teresa, for example, expressed her certainty over the authenticity of her spiritual visions, even though she feared it could liken her to fraudulent visionaries such as Magdalena de la Cruz: “Since, during those times the devil was causing great illusions and deceiving many women, I began to fear . . .

¹⁹⁰ For Teresa’s use of *suavidad*, see *Life*, especially chapters 15 and 16. Although examples of Ahlgren’s five principles may be found throughout Teresa’s work, *Life*’s chapter 10 presents outstanding similarities with Francisca’s discourse on the discernment of spirits.

¹⁹¹ “No cure de unas humildades que hay, de que pienso tratar, que les parece humildad no entender que el Señor les va dando dones. Entendamos bien, como ello es, que nos los da Dios sin ningún merecimiento nuestro, y agradezcámoslo a Su Majestad; porque si no conocemos que recibimos, no despertamos a amar”.

¹⁹² For a discussion on *alumbrados* see chapter 1.

but on the other hand, I saw in myself a great certainty that this was of God” (*Life* 23.2).¹⁹³ Teresa worried throughout her life that she could be held as either deceived or deceiver, but despite her fears, she could not but feel sure that her spiritual experiences came from God. In *The Interior Castle* Teresa explained that “God fixes Himself in the interior of a soul in such a way that, upon returning to itself, in no way can it doubt that it was in God, and God in it. This truth is imprinted with such firmness that, even though many years pass without God granting this mercy, the soul cannot forget it or doubt it” (5.1.9).¹⁹⁴ This certainty was a result of the visions themselves, and the visionary was unable to doubt it, regardless of the passing of time.

Francisca was equally convinced that her spiritual visions were of God. When the inquisitor wanted to push her to declare how she was so sure that what she had seen had a divine origin, Francisca replied: “whenever she goes inside herself, she has always found great conformity with Our Lord’s will . . . and out of this inner peace she knows and has known that it is God and not the devil who is the possessor of her soul, because the devil does not bring peace or quiet, but war and grudges and all things evil” (189^br-v).¹⁹⁵ Francisca argued that even though she felt the distresses that life brought, her interior peace was such that it could not be troubled. She attributed this state of true and indefectible peace to God. It simply could not be explained as anything else. This certainty of visions coming from God is also evidenced in the way Francisca described her visions as experiences that were not dissimilar from everyday life. She described that “when in rapture,

¹⁹³ “Yo, como en estos tiempos habían acaecido grandes ilusiones en mujeres y engaños que las había hecho el demonio, comencé a temer, como era tan grande el deleite y suavidad que sentía, y muchas veces sin poderlo excusar, puesto que veía en mí por otra parte una grandísima seguridad que era Dios, en especial cuando estaba en la oración, y veía que quedaba de allí muy mejorada y con más fortaleza.”

¹⁹⁴ “Fija Dios a sí mismo en lo interior de aquel alma de manera que cuando torna en sí en ninguna manera pueda dudar que estuvo en Dios y Dios en ella. Con tanta firmeza le queda esta verdad, que aunque pase años sin tornarle Dios a hacer aquella merced, ni se le olvida ni puede dudar que estuvo.”

¹⁹⁵ “En entrando dentro de su interior, halla y ha hallado siempre una gran conformidad con la voluntad de Nuestro Señor para todas las cosas que se la ofrecen y para no darle turbación ningún trabajo, y de esta paz interior que dicho tiene conoce y ha conocido que es Dios poseedor de su alma y no el demonio, porque el demonio no da paz ni sosiego, sino guerra y rencores y todo lo que es maldad.”

the meaning of everything settles in the soul, and it is as settled as when upon seeing someone that is known to us one would say ‘that person is the said person [that we know]’” (fol. 186v).¹⁹⁶ Francisca’s description resonates with an episode in *Life* in which Teresa went to her confessor to tell him that she had had a vision of Christ. She clarified that she had not seen him with her bodily eyes, but rather, she had felt his presence in a way that she could not doubt that it was him:

My confessor then asked me ‘who told you it was Jesus Christ?’ I replied ‘he often tells me so himself.’ But before he told me so it was imprinted in my understanding that it was him, and before that, he would tell me and I could not see him. If a person whom I had never seen, but only heard of, came to speak to me while I was blind or in darkness, I would believe him, but I could not confirm that it was that person as confidently as if I would have seen him. In this case it is possible, because although he is not seen, he is so clearly imprinted that it is not possible to doubt. The Lord wants to be so sculpted in the understanding that one cannot doubt it more than that which one sees. (*Life* 27.5)¹⁹⁷

Francisca and Teresa expressed the impossibility to doubt the divine origin of their visions. In a way, these supernatural experiences were as real to them as the physical world, and instilled in the visionaries the certainty that they came from God. The belief in the divine nature of their visions put these women in a fragile position, as they were forced to confront accusations of being deceivers or deceived. And while Teresa succeeded at challenging accusations of deception, making a case for herself as a genuine visionary, Francisca, instead, was tried and punished for being an *ilusa*, a deceived woman. The radically different fates of Teresa and Francisca indicate that, although both women based the defense of the authenticity of their visionary activity on the same criteria, their defense strategies cannot fully explain the outcome of their lives. Necessarily,

¹⁹⁶ “Dijo que cuando está arrebatada se asienta en el alma la significación de cada cosa que es tan de asiento como si vieses una persona conocida y dijese ‘aquello es aquella persona.’”

¹⁹⁷ “Pues preguntóme el confesor: ¿quién dijo que era Jesucristo? Él me lo dice muchas veces, respondí yo; mas antes que me lo dijese se imprimió en mi entendimiento que era Él, y antes de esto me lo decía y no le veía. Si una persona que yo nunca hubiese visto sino oído nuevas de ella, me viniese a hablar estando ciega o en gran oscuridad, y me dijese quién era, lo creería, mas no tan determinadamente lo podría afirmar ser aquella persona como si la hubiera visto. Acá sí, que sin verse, se imprime con una noticia tan clara que no parece se puede dudar; que quiere el Señor esté tan esculpido en el entendimiento, que no se puede dudar más que lo que se ve.”

other important variables were at play in ensuring their authenticity as visionaries. One of the most salient features in Francisca's case is how unwilling the inquisitor was to give her the benefit of the doubt. Preconceptions of accusers or the nature of accusations in themselves could have played a role in determining Francisca's and Teresa's differing outcomes. I will now move on to the analysis of some of the accusations against Francisca, compared to those against Teresa, to analyze their role in the defense of their authenticity as visionaries.

The Case for Deception: Accusations and Defense

Inquisitor Llano de Valdés never considered, at least on the record, the possibility of Francisca's authenticity as visionary. His skeptical attitude suggests that he rapidly made up his mind: Francisca's visions were a deceitful trick by the devil. Llano gave mainly three reasons for this conclusion: first, he considered Francisca to be prideful; second, he believed witnesses' accounts and Francisca's own confession that she and her sister Isabel had been possessed by the devil; and third, her raptures had been scandalous and public, and, in his view, intended to gain fame. Llano's strategy to delegitimize the authenticity of Francisca's visions began by shaming her. He declared her unworthy of the *mercedes* she claimed to have received. For him, what she had described, had only occurred "between God and the most perfect saints." And even they had acknowledged the possibility of being deceived by the devil. Llano urged Francisca to admit her unworthiness in receiving such gifts, and explained that, according to logic, her visions could only be tricks from the devil, "all the more so because she and her sister had been possessed by the

devil” (fol. 188v).¹⁹⁸ The inquisitor also mentioned how the saints had not publicized their spiritual experiences as she had done, which, to him, was further proof of her vanity (fols. 188v-189^ar).¹⁹⁹

Llano tried to discredit Francisca’s account by undermining her trustworthiness and her moral standing. He accused Francisca of being too sure of her state of spiritual grace, of being prideful and arrogant. To all these accusations, Francisca replied with a consistent discourse, similar to the one employed by Teresa in her writings. She also added that having been possessed by the devil had not been an obstacle to do good works, or to love God and neighbor. She acknowledged her unworthiness in having received spiritual gifts, and attributed her visions to God’s mercy. Finally, she denied that she had publicized her visions and explained that she had confided in a few close friends with the purpose of bringing them closer to God. Those friends had spread the word publicly and misinterpreted her spiritual experiences (fols. 189^av-190r). Francisca’s response is a display of her rhetorical strategies, and it also puts forth a compelling argument in her own defense. Despite her robust justification, the inquisitor contended that what she said did not “appear to be true” (fol. 189^bv).²⁰⁰ He told her that he reprimanded her for her vanity, her certainty in claiming that she had seen the visions she described, and her wish for all

¹⁹⁸ “Fuele dicho que lo que tiene contado de sí . . . son cosas que apenas sabemos que las haya tratado Dios con los santos muy perfectos, después de haber muchos años que están en gran soledad y penitencia . . . y aún éstos después de todo esto, no ven ni se persuaden que les haga Dios tanta [illegible] ni ellos la merecen, antes están muy recatados sabiendo que es muy ordinario del demonio aparecerse en ángel de luz . . . y así cuando ven tales cosas acrecientan sus penitencias, sabiendo como saben que sus obras, por grandes que sean ellas solas no les han de merecer tanta merced. Y así la confesante había de ver de su poquedad lo mismo, y ver antes que eran enredos del demonio o que no favores y regalos del Señor, mayormente habiendo sido poseedora ella y su hermana del demonio.”

¹⁹⁹ “También porque los santos nunca acostumbraron a publicar de sí favor que les hiciese Dios, y con mucha razón, pues se había de temer no les estarse el ángel malo por la vanidad siendo ellos tan humildes, y ésta ha poseído mucho a la declarante, pues ha dicho y publicado a muchas personas lo que en este proceso ha confesado y declarado. Por lo cual es de ver que la confesante sabe muy bien que todo esto que de sí tiene dicho antes es cosa del demonio que de Dios.”

²⁰⁰ “Fuele dicho que vuelva sobre sí y mire en lo que dice y lo que trata porque estas cosas de Dios son de tanto peso y de tanta importancia que no las había de osar tratar tan palpablemente aunque fuera verdad lo que ha dicho cuanto más que no lleva semejanza de verdad.”

to believe that they were true (fol. 189^{bv}).²⁰¹ She replied that she didn't say anything out of vanity, but out of her need to say the truth. The inquisitor insisted that she had spread the news about her visions, and that the entire city "was filled with those her things, and from her own mouth," from which he could not think that her motivation was anything other than vanity (fol. 189^{bv}).²⁰²

The exchange described above developed in the context of what became a critical stage in Francisca's trial. The *audiencias* of December 2nd, 3rd, and 5th of 1575 consisted of intense interrogations on complex theological matters, all regarding the issue of the discernment of spirits. At this point, Francisca started to show signs of exhaustion, and the discussion between her and Llano became stagnant. Francisca began to respond to his questions by stating that she either didn't know how to answer, or that she had nothing more to add to what she had replied before. In one of these sessions, Llano went as far as to demand Francisca to prove that her visions came from God. He literally asked her to either give him a good reason by which she knew that her spiritual experiences came from God, or to "produce a miracle by which she can be believed" (fol. 192v).²⁰³ Francisca's reply feels disheartening. She said that she did not find anything else to add to what she had already said, and that miracles were only for God to produce. She insisted that she had not maintained that her visions came from God out of vanity, but because this is what she had understood to be true (fol. 192v).²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ "Fuele dicho que . . . lo que se reprende es la vanidad suya y los desatinos que cuenta que ha visto y ve y la seguridad con que habla en ellos y quiere que se entienda ser verdad."

²⁰² "Fuele dicho que estuviera bien lo que dice si fuera así que no lo hubiera tratado ni dicho a otras personas, pero que toda la ciudad está llena de estas cosas suyas y de su boca, donde se ve que todo es vanidad."

²⁰³ "Y que si así es que todo procede de Dios, que dé razón por donde lo ha entendido o muestre milagro por donde pueda ser creída, u obras tales de que se presuma lo que dice o alguna muestra que nos dé a entender estos sus arrebatamientos ser de Dios."

²⁰⁴ "Dijo que no halla en ello qué decir, más de lo que tiene dicho, que milagros sólo a Dios es hacerlos y que la confesante no permanece en dar a entender que esto es verdad que tiene dicho por ninguna vanidad, sino porque en efecto entendió la confesante ser de parte de Dios."

One month later, on January 5th, 1576, Francisca was summoned from her prison cell to hear the formal accusation that the prosecutor, *fiscal* Pedro Soto Cameno, had composed against her. Francisca was read a total of 144 accusations, with a few comments by Soto Cameno stating whether her crimes were of arrogance, heresy, or recklessness. The most salient accusations are: Francisca's belief that friar Juan de Dios was a prophet; her claim that the monasteries she wanted to found were inspired by divine revelation; her proclamation of the holiness of her sister Isabel; her defense of the innocence of Archbishop Carranza and her belief that he was to be freed miraculously; her interpretation of her spiritual visions as divine gifts; her claim that God had chosen Carranza, Isabel, Miguel Ruiz, and herself as instruments to atone for the sins of the world; her criticism of the corruption of the Church and the need to reform it; her admission that she had been possessed by demons and the claim that she obtained victory over them;²⁰⁵ allegations from *beatas* that Francisca forced them to confess with her;²⁰⁶ her vision of spiritual marriage with Christ;²⁰⁷ her prideful defense of the legitimacy of her visions; and her claims that the visions came with a deep and long-lasting feeling of love of God (fols. 196r-208v).

Soto Cameno ended the accusation with a harsh statement of what he saw as Francisca's obvious culpability. He recommended that she would be excommunicated, declared as heretic, relaxed to the secular justice, and exemplarily punished. He was convinced that Francisca was hiding other crimes, for which he recommended that she be submitted to torture during

²⁰⁵ Teresa uses similar terms to describe how she became unafraid of demons. About them she noted that "it is without a doubt that they seemed to fear me, because I was left with calm and without any fear of them, even until today. Although I saw them at times, as I will say later, I no longer feared them, but rather they seemed to fear me. I was left with power over them" (*Life* 25.20).

²⁰⁶ Llamas Martínez has explained how Teresa faced similar accusations that ranged from intruding into her nuns' spiritual life to demanding that her nuns confessed with her. See *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la inquisición española*, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Teresa talks extensively about spiritual marriage in chapters 1 and 2 of the 7th mansions. See *The Interior Castle*.

interrogation (fol. 207r).²⁰⁸ Francisca fainted upon hearing her accusation. She came back to her senses crying, begging permission to reply to the accusation at a later time, and assuring the inquisitor that she would say the truth without the need for torture (fols. 207r-v).²⁰⁹ It is likely that Francisca felt at this point that her case was lost. She begged to have the assistance of a *letrado* who would help her elaborate her defense, and she justified this request as part of the need to have someone on her side. She spent the beginning of the following *audiencia* requesting a *letrado* to act on her behalf, and described herself as a woman with fragile spirit, incapable to face, all by herself, the fierce rigor of the inquisitor.²¹⁰ The entire episode, as chronicled by the scribe, is heartbreaking.

From January 27th to February 15th, Francisca and Llano met for long interrogating sessions in which Francisca was asked to defend herself against each of the 144 accusations against her. The *audiencias*, judging by the length of the corresponding folios and by the highly sophisticated theological content that was discussed, must have been excruciating for both of them. Francisca responded fairly well to most of the inquisitor's questions. She described herself as merely a woman who could not understand many of the theological aspects of the accusations (fol. 209r). But around accusation 40, she started to show signs of exhaustion. From this point on, Francisca's defense was more intermittent than it was consistent. She vacillated between presenting her

²⁰⁸ "Pido la manden declararan y la declaren por hereje y como a tal la manden relajar y relajen a la justicia y brazo seglar . . . y cuando esto lugar no haya, que la manden condenar y condenen en las mayores y más graves penas en derecho puestas y estatuidas contra los semejantes delincuentes porque a ella sea pena y castigo y otros tomen en ella ejemplo.

Otrosí pido necesario siendo sea puesta a cuestión de tormento, el cual le sea dado y repetido tantas cuantas veces hubiere lugar de derecho."

²⁰⁹ "Volvió en sí llorando y volvió en sí diciendo cómo no se ha de acabar el juicio con estas cosas, y dijo que no estaba ahora para poder responder a la dicha acusación y pedía al Señor Inquisidor lo deje para otra audiencia. Y más dijo que para decir las verdades no ha menester que se dé tormento, que sin tormento dirá la verdad."

²¹⁰ "La dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles dijo que ella es mujer de muy flaco ánimo y el señor inquisidor es una persona de tanto rigor en sus preguntas y en todas las demás cosas y que ella no tiene ánimo para esperar sus redarguciones tan terribles."

arguments to dispute accusations; responding that the accusations were false; and citing her previous answers, so as to avoid a renewed cycle of questions. As she began a slow process of giving in, she acknowledged that the role of the inquisitor was to disillusion her, to *desengañarla* (fols. 233r-v).²¹¹ Llano pressed harder. He insisted that she was deceived, and referred to Francisca's prophecy that Carranza would be miraculously liberated by intercession of the Virgin in 1574. Two years had passed and, the inquisitor noted, Carranza continued in jail. Her visions were false. Francisca defended the content and legitimacy of her vision, and attributed to God's mysteries the fact that the prophecy remained unfulfilled.²¹²

The discussion of this unfulfilled vision encapsulates the use of the idea of religious deception in visionary women. On the one hand, the inquisitor interpreted it as proof that Francisca lied, or at the very least, that she had been deceived by the devil.²¹³ For Llano, there was no purpose to an unfulfilled prophecy, and lack of purpose, he argued, was not of God. Therefore, Francisca lied about her spiritual visions, or she had been the victim of the devil's tricks. On the other hand, Francisca insisted on her certainty that she had experienced the vision, and that the vision came from God. Whereas Llano's strategy was to logically explain that an unfulfilled prophecy was untrue and ungodly, Francisca's strategy was to admit that she could not fully know or understand what she called God's secrets. In a way, these two people tackled the problem of religious deception from very different angles: Llano sought to make certain, knowable, and logical the workings of God, while Francisca conceded that God and his plans were uncertain, and exceeded the capacity of human rationale. This idea of what is and what is not of God that Llano cited (fols.

²¹¹ "Que si es engaño, que ella no lo ha sentido que así lo fuere, para eso está aquí el señor inquisidor, para la desengañar, y se holgaba a ello porque su deseo es realmente de servir a Dios en espíritu y en verdad."

²¹² Carranza would be freed a couple of months later, in April 14th, 1576, after he was declared not guilty of heresy.

²¹³ Weber has recognized Teresa's unwillingness to link false visions with demonic influence. She preferred to attribute nuns' false visions to the female nature, prone to melancholy and bad humors, than to the devil. This was not the opinion of many theologians, and certainly not Llano's. See "Monjas melancólicas."

233r-v) was merely an attempt to make certain something that Francisca considered as impossible to know or understand, and that she described as divine mysteries.

Llano pressed on, asking her whether she thought that her visions came from God or from the devil (fol. 235r).²¹⁴ The question, asked in such a way, forced Francisca to pick between two impossible choices. It was a double bind. If she responded that her visions came from God, she could be deemed a heretic and would openly contradict Llano's opinion. If she responded that they were a trick by the devil, she admitted that she had been deceived and would surrender all her power as an authentic visionary. Francisca did not have much of a choice. She declared herself unable to determine whether the visions came from God or from the devil, and acquiesced to the inquisitors' opinion. This newly found obedience is a bit similar to that of Teresa, but unlike the Carmelite, Francisca arrived to this point compelled by the pressure of the inquisitor, and rather reluctantly. Her timing might have worked against her, because the deference to the inquisitor only came after 144 accusations had accumulated against her. In contrast, Teresa produced her obedience repeatedly and as a foreword to her claims of spiritual experiences. It functioned as a disclaimer in case her words went beyond safe limits. For Francisca, this expression of obedience came when it might have been too late to work in her favor.

Still, in her submission to the authority of the inquisitor, Francisca used a language remarkably similar to that of Teresa. She acknowledged his dual power, both as a man and as a theologian: "She said she believes everything that the inquisitor says, since he is the person that has more light from God to understand these things, unlike her, and that she has not pretended to say or do anything that offends Our Lord, and that if she learned that she was doing so, she would

²¹⁴ "Fuele dicho que resta a que declare en qué opinión dijo está de aquellas cosas y revelaciones, si cree que fueron de Dios o del demonio.

Dijo que no se determinará a decir si eran de Dios o del demonio, mas de que lo que el señor inquisidor la dijere y enseñare eso creerá."

not do it for all heaven or earth” (fol. 235v).²¹⁵ There is a remarkably similar use of this kind of language of submission to the religious authority of *letrados* in Teresa’s *Interior Castle*, when the Carmelite described the experience of union to her nuns: “In difficult matters, even though I think that I understand them and that I say the truth, I always use this language of ‘it seems to me,’ for if I am deceived, I am most willing to believe whatever theologians will tell me” (5.1.7).²¹⁶ Teresa used this language as a preventive measure, but also as the expression of her real concerns about her own orthodoxy and the success of her religious reform. Her rhetoric of deception, as discussed in the previous chapter, had a dissuading effect on accusations against her, especially those that represented her as a deceiver. Although Francisca also drew upon this language of submission to religious authority, it did not help her case, and the inquisitor remained unpersuaded. Perhaps the situation and timing of their use was just as important as the rhetorical strategies.

A New Deception: Francisca’s Secret

After Francisca acknowledged the authority of the inquisitor, she responded to each of the following accusations with a formulaic expression: “she says what she has already said” (fols. 236v-238v).²¹⁷ She refused to add anything, and she gave up trying to make a case for her defense. It is easy to sense that her spirit was broken, and she no longer felt the strength to stand up to the inquisitor. A full year passed until March 6th of 1577, when prosecutor Soto Cameno appeared before inquisitor Llano to present seven new accusations against Francisca. The new charges revolved around a sex scandal that involved Francisca and another prisoner, *licenciado* Amador

²¹⁵ “Dijo que ella cree todo lo que el señor inquisidor le dice como persona que tiene más luz de Dios para entender esas cosas que no ella, y que lo que ella trata es que no ha dicho ni pretendido hacer cosa en ofensa de Nuestro Señor, y que si entendiera que lo era no lo hiciera por el cielo ni por la tierra.”

²¹⁶ “Siempre en cosas dificultosas, aunque me parece que lo entiendo y que digo verdad, voy con este lenguaje de que «me parece», porque si me engañare, estoy muy aparejada a creer lo que me dijeren los que tienen letras muchas.”

²¹⁷ “Dice lo que dicho tiene.”

de Velasco. The witness was an Italian priest, don Vicencio, who shared cell with Amador. Don Vicencio testified that Amador had been exchanging love letters with Francisca, in which they said “loving words, Francisca de los Apóstoles calling *licenciado* Velasco her husband, and him calling her wife, and saying that after they got out of prison, they would get married” (fol. 163r).²¹⁸ Whenever Francisca went to get her meals, she would turn to see Amador, and they exchanged brief greetings. But shortly thereafter, don Vicencio and his cellmates were transferred to a different unit. From then on, Francisca and Amador wrote to one another, and according to don Vicencio, the messages contained “many loving things and vulgarities,” including the explicit names of their sexual organs and unambiguous expressions of their mutual desire (fol. 164r).²¹⁹

The love affair included many salacious details that simultaneously fueled scandal and turned Francisca into an obvious and easy target for accusations of deception. For instance, in what is a clear invitation for intercourse, Francisca had written to Amador that she had been with her “flower,” had cleaned herself up, and had lain down in bed, saying “Come here *licenciado*, and make me a Bernardinico” (fols. 164r-v).²²⁰ The witness stated that Francisca had sent Amador some small rags, which she had previously put in her genitals. Amador also wrote to her, asking to send him three of her pubic hairs. At some point Francisca replied saying she was pregnant and felt the small creature already moving inside of her (fol. 164v).²²¹ Don Vicencio’s testimony cast

²¹⁸ “. . . palabras de amores, llamando la dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles al dicho Licenciado Velasco marido y él a ella mujer, y decían que salidos de la prisión se habían de casar.”

²¹⁹ “. . . y en ellos se decían muchas cosas de amores y bellaquerías, nombrando sus miembros, ella los suyos y los de él, y él los de ella y los suyos por sus propios nombres, y se acuerda que decía la dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles en los dichos papeles que ya estaba harta de ayunar veinte años había, que en saliendo de la prisión ella y él se habían de juntar y tener juntamiento carnal el uno con el otro, nombrándolo por vocablos torpes y sucios y que lo habían de hacer así, a banderas desplegadas.”

²²⁰ “En uno de los papeles que la dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles escribió al dicho licenciado Velasco le enviaba a decir que había estado con su flor y que ya estaba limpia y que se había lavado muy bien y púestose camisa limpia y echádose en la cama y estando en ella había dicho ‘Ven aquí licenciado y hazme un Bernardinico y tu bellaquillo no lo quisiste hacer y halleme vacío.’”

²²¹ “Dijo que en los dichos papeles vio este declarante que la dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles una vez envió al licenciado Velasco unos trapillos de lienzo de grandor de una mano y le envió a decir el papel que aquellos trapillos que le enviaba había ella teníolos en su natura . . . Y el dicho licenciado Amador de Velasco escribió a la dicha

a new shadow of doubt over Francisca's credibility as religious reformer and authenticity as beneficiary of God's gifts. Her defense was already weakened, but the new charges added yet another layer of doubt that allowed the accusers to further question her moral quality. They would suggest that the image she had tried to convey of herself as a holy visionary did not correspond to her behavior in prison.

Soto Cameno's accusation is eloquent in this respect. It begins by reproving Francisca for "feigning and making everyone think that she was a saint, claiming publicly to receive revelations from Our Lord and saying that God had married her and that God had asked her father for his permission to do so" while she also called a fellow prisoner her husband and had agreed to marry him upon their release from prison (fol. 243r).²²² The problem for religious authorities, again, was that Francisca was a deceiving *beata* and her pretensions of holiness could not be trusted. The prosecutor's new accusations suggest he considered that Francisca had feigned her own sanctity, but that her behavior while in prison had revealed her true nature: that of a deceiving, sinful woman. Furthermore, Francisca's declaration of her sexual desire for Amador challenged her own characterization of living a virtuous and religious life and portrayed her as an unrepentant sinner. Soto Cameno defined her as "desvergonzada lujuriosa," a shameless, lustful woman. He held her as guilty of these and many other "deshonestidades," sexual offenses, and recommended that she be punished (fol. 243v). Francisca did not immediately reply to this new round of accusations. She said she would do so in writing.

Francisca de los Apóstoles . . . que le enviase tres pelos de su natura que él los conocería muy bien . . . y la dicha Francisca de los Apóstoles le enviaba a decir que ya estaba preñada de él de un Bernardico y que ya bullía en las tripas."

²²² ". . . que la susodicha fingiendo y dando a entender ser santa, diciendo y publicando tener revelaciones de Nuestro Señor y que Dios se había desposado con ella y que había Dios enviado a pedir licencia a su padre para ello . . . diciendo y tratando en público estas y otras cosas como santa, en las cárceles, en secreto, ha tratado y tiene concertado de se casar con cierta persona y le llamada marido y él a ella mujer y le procura de ver y hablar como en efecto lo ha hecho."

Francisca's written response begins with a reiteration of the arguments that she had previously used for her defense. She started by stating that she had never held herself to be a saint, and that the entire ordeal had been the result of her imprudence. She had confided her spiritual experiences in women who she had considered as her friends, but who had misinterpreted her and even used her account against her (fol. 246r).²²³ And then, Francisca displayed an exceptional use of strategic thinking and rhetoric. She used the idea of deception to face and challenge the new accusations. First, she insisted that she had given the truthful account of all things as they had happened to her. Then, Francisca recognized that, thanks to the inquisitor, she had finally understood that, as an ignorant woman, she had been deceived by the devil. She went as far as to declare that even if an angel were to appear to her and contradict what she had learned during her trial, she would not believe it, but would think it was the devil trying to deceive her. And thus, it only made sense that, seeing how she had been in peril of damnation, she no longer wanted to pursue religious life, but had determined to get married. Francisca argued that perhaps as a married woman she would have a better chance at attaining the salvation of her soul (fol. 246r).²²⁴

Francisca's line of argument is extraordinary. She justified her alleged immoral behavior through the idea advanced by her accusers that she had been deceived by the devil. Rather than oppose Llano and Soto Cameno, both trained theologians, Francisca accepted their opinion that all

²²³ "Yo no me he tenido por santa ni he hecho obras para serlo, sino de gran pecadora, sino que como mujer imprudente y de poca experiencia en las cosas de Nuestro Señor, traté con las que tenía por amigas las cosas que tengo declaradas en todas las audiencias que conmigo se han tenido y estas amigas me han puesto todas las cosas contrarias espíritu que yo las traté."

²²⁴ "Yo he declarado con toda verdad todas las cosas que me han pasado y como yo pensaba que iba por camino muy cierto de mi salvación y no entendía como ignorante y mujer de poca experiencia los engaños de Satanás, el cual quizá me quería engañar como ha hecho a otras. Mas ahora que he visto que todas las audiencias que conmigo se han tenido ha sido dándome a entender que iba engañada por el camino que yo pensé iba muy segura en el servicio de Dios, he determinado . . . sólo creer lo que en este Santo Oficio se me ha enseñado y si un ángel me dijere lo contrario, no lo creeré, sino que pensaré es el demonio que me quiere engañar. Y viendo yo en el gran trabajo que me ha puesto este negocio, y teniendo por gran peligro la libertad, he determinado de mudar estado y casarme porque quizá me salvare mejor que a lo contrario"

of her spiritual experiences had been the result of the devil's intervention. And since the pursuit of God had brought upon her such a terrible outcome (prison, trial by the Inquisition), it was only natural that she would rethink her life choices. She explained that she had found a man who was willing to marry her, which also implied that she renounced her pretensions of holiness. She no longer sought to be held a living saint and was, through this new form of life, guaranteeing that she would not relapse back into her visionary activity. Deception, once more, emerges a contested category of power that both religious authorities and visionary women used to their own advantage. Francisca also asked the inquisitor to consider that her exchange of messages with Amador should be regarded as one that happened between a woman and the man who had promised to marry her. She asked for mercy, and begged the inquisitor to consider that she was merely woman, on the verge of despair after many years of suffering (fol. 247r).²²⁵

Francisca was condemned to abjure her errors during an *auto de fe*, which happened on April 14th, 1578. She was also sentenced to receive one hundred lashes and to three years of banishment from the city of Toledo (fol. 2r).²²⁶ We lose trace of her after that. We do not know if indeed she married Amador Velasco, or if her father offered her a home in Madrid, or if she was able to make a proper livelihood. Ahlgren has suggested that, after such a long and public trial, Francisca likely had to endure social exclusion and poverty (Apóstoles 32), and it is hard to imagine that Francisca could find opportunities to thrive after she was effectively condemned by

²²⁵ "Téngase atención a que soy mujer y estoy casi desesperada de pasar toda mi vida muchos trabajos y enfermedades."

²²⁶ In the original and in full: "La Villa de Madrid a 27 días del mes de enero de 1578 años, habiendo visto los señores del Consejo de su Majestad de la General Inquisición el proceso de pleito criminal contra Francisca de Ávila, alias de los Apóstoles, presa en las cárceles secretas del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de la ciudad y reino de Toledo, mandaron que la dicha Francisca de Ávila, alias de los Apóstoles salga al auto público de la fe en forma de penitente donde se le lea su sentencia y abjure de levi y otro día le sean dados cien azotes por las calles públicas y acostumbradas de la dicha ciudad de Toledo con los de pregonero que manifieste su delito y sea desterrada de la ciudad de Toledo con cinco leguas a la redonda por tiempo y espacio de tres años precisos y no lo quebrante so pena de cumplirlo doblado."

the Inquisition. Francisca's case is a great example of the role that the idea of deception played in the context of religious authority. In the end, she was not able to defend the legitimacy of her spiritual experiences, and she was forced to acknowledge the inquisitor's opinion that her visionary activity was indeed a deceitful trick by the devil. It is now important to establish a final comparison between Francisca's failure and Teresa's success, especially in light of their similar use of rhetorical strategies.

Francisca and Teresa: Beyond the Rhetoric of Deception

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Francisca and Teresa ever met, their lives gravitated toward similar preoccupations, they shared the same religious aspirations, used similar rhetorical strategies, and even converged around the same places. Francisca lived in Toledo, at least until her banishment, but her legal name was Francisca de Ávila. Alternatively, Teresa's family was from Toledo, and moved to Ávila searching for a new beginning, where no one could suspect their *converso* origin. Teresa's father was, in fact, known in Ávila as *el toledano* (Lincoln 4). The two women likely coincided in Toledo three times: in 1562, 1569, and again in 1576. Teresa was then at the peak of her foundational and writing activity. In her first trip to Toledo she started to write *The Book of Her Life*. In the second one, she got into a grueling confrontation with Carranza's immediate successor, don Gómez Tello Girón, who had been appointed as governor of the Archbishopric of Toledo after Carranza's imprisonment. The religious atmosphere was tense, not only because of the archbishop's trial, but also because the city was already filled to capacity with convents and monasteries. According to a well-known anecdote, Teresa requested the license to found her reformed convent in the city, and after months of not obtaining an answer, she met with Tello Girón and reproached him: "It is a raucous thing that there are women who want to live with much rigor and perfection and enclosure, and those who do not live in this way, but who live

comfortably, want to hinder such work that is in service of Our Lord” (Rodríguez 30).²²⁷ We have seen before that Francisca and Isabel faced a similar ordeal with Tello Girón’s successor, Sancho Busto de Villegas. Like Teresa, the sisters resorted to the governor to get a license to found their monasteries, but unlike the Carmelite, they were not granted the permit. Busto de Villegas denied the request citing the scandal that surrounded the *beatas* (fol. 178v).

Teresa’s third and final visit to Toledo in 1576 came as Francisca faced the second year of her trial. The *beata* was approximately 37 years old, while Teresa was 61. Teresa too was navigating difficult times. The quarrel between the reformed and unreformed branches of the Carmelite order had become so bitter that Father Rubeo, the General of the Carmelites, had instructed her to refrain from further foundations and to remain secluded in one of her convents (Madre de Dios 649). Teresa stayed for over a year in Toledo, where (we can only speculate) she likely had the chance to learn about Francisca’s case. Both women were, at the same time and in the same place, forced to handle the consequences of having propelled their reforming projects, and both were challenged for having reclaimed, as visionary women, a voice of religious authority. As Teresa kept Rubeo’s mandate of seclusion in Toledo, inquisitor Juan de Llano de Valdés suspected Francisca of being an *ilusa*, a deluded or self-deceived woman, and possibly also a heretic (*alumbrada*). Interestingly, in the following decade, identical charges against Teresa and her written works would reach the Inquisition.

The cases of Francisca and Teresa are comparable in many ways. The similarity of their spiritual experiences, some of their motivations for religious reform, and even their use of rhetorical strategies to defend the authenticity of their visions, is evident. Both criticized the way in which the clergy implemented religious authority, both protested the limited role for women

²²⁷ In the original: “Recia cosa es que haya mujeres que quieren vivir con tanto rigor y perfección y encerramiento, y que los que no pasan nada de esto, sino que están regalados, quieran estorbar obra de tanto servicio a nuestro Señor.”

within the Church, both justified their reforming efforts on the grounds of their own spiritual experiences, and both women explained their raptures and supernatural visions as divine gifts, bestowed unto them because of God's grace and unrelated to their own merit to deserve them. Unsurprisingly, ecclesial authorities responded to the visionary activity of these women in a similar way, by accusing them of being either deceivers or deceived. Theologians and *calificadores* of the Inquisition categorized Francisca and Teresa as either imposters, women deceived or possessed by the devil, or self-deceived individuals with a feverish imagination.

Yet, despite all of these similarities, Teresa and Francisca ended up having oddly divergent fates. While Teresa was rapidly canonized and her holiness became an institutionally sanctioned fact merely 40 years after her death, Francisca was condemned to flogging and exile. And while Teresa became a celebrated phenomenon of orthodoxy, a venerated saint for the following centuries, Francisca's story, instead, was covered in shame and silence. Teresa's utter success was so quick and definitive that Teresianist scholars still remain puzzled by numerous questions that surround it. Her triumph was the result of a complicated aggregation of many variables, and I would argue that Francisca's case raises new and important issues that problematize a simplistic explanation for Teresa's major achievement. The comparison between Francisca and Teresa is relevant precisely because it allows us to identify clues that led to their different endings. In the following pages, I provide a quick summary of some of the most important variables that have been discussed as possible explanations for Teresa's success, and I will examine how their presence or absence in Francisca's case further illuminates our understanding of the different endings that these women reached, even despite all of their similarities.

For instance, an important problem to consider is the different implications of having advanced reforming projects in Ávila rather than in Toledo. Jodi Bilinkoff has studied the general

atmosphere of religious reform in Spain, and particularly in Ávila. Bilinkoff has demonstrated that Ávila had a long tradition of reform, which might have favored the Carmelite's own reforming enterprise.²²⁸ The situation was strikingly different in Toledo, where Carranza's imprisonment had led to growing religious and economic tensions. As Ahlgren has pointed out, Francisca's trial is an important window into the difficult social and economic situation for the people of Toledo. Carranza, while in office, had tried to make policy changes meant to provide relief for the poor. His absence and his trial by the Inquisition became a sort of symbol of the Church's unfulfilled promises, and it made more evident the corruption of the clergy (Apóstoles 11). Francisca voiced a strong criticism of the local priesthood, who not only had failed to provide aid to those in need, but who, in some cases, even profited from them. Carranza's imprisonment resulted in opposition to rigorous forms of fervor, as ecclesial officials, confronted by claims of corruption, attempted to exert a more rigid control of religious discourse.

Another important element is what Enrique Llamas Martínez has described as the powerful effect of Teresa's personality on her opponents. And, although it is extremely difficult to gather evidence of the influence that something as ethereal as Teresa's presence and character might have exerted on some of her contemporaries, it is true that she swayed some of her initial persecutors after meeting with them.²²⁹ Francisca, on the other hand, didn't seem able to secure many allies, and rapidly lost the ones she had initially made. Many of the women whom she had once persuaded to join her religious community later testified against her to the Inquisition, while the religious men who had endorsed her reforming project ended up confessing they had been deceived, and

²²⁸ See Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*.

²²⁹ Llamas mentions the cases of Inquisitor General Quiroga (see p. XII); theologian Bartolomé de Medina (p. 18); and the Jesuit Rodrigo Álvarez (p.110). Importantly, it is also true that some theologians who had personally met Teresa and initially had a good opinion of her, later changed their minds and accused her to the Inquisition upon reading her written work. Such was the case with Dominicans Juan de Lorenzana and Juan de Orellana. See Llamas, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la inquisición española*, especially part 3.

even blaming their deception on Francisca's demonic possession. What is more, as her trial progressed, the inquisitor's opinion of her only worsened. By the time the prosecutor raised a second round of accusations, Llano had branded the *beata* as too prideful. Throughout the manuscript of her trial we find no evidence to indicate that Francisca's personality might have led her to make significant partnerships. The only exception was Amador de Velasco, and this alliance dealt yet another crushing blow to Francisca's defense.

The impressive network of allies and powerful figures that supported Teresa has also been represented as another partial explanation for her success. Among her close collaborators and supporters were an Inquisitor General, notable members of the nobility, wealthy merchants, and after her death, even King Philip II.²³⁰ Francisca, in contrast, was acting mostly on her own, or with very limited social capital. She and her sister Isabel tried to secure financial support for their projected convents from a few noble women, but they either didn't proceed with their support or entirely withdrew their patronage. According to the witnesses' account, this failure to consolidate alliances with influential noblewomen was largely attributed to the public scandal that surrounded Francisca's visionary activity. In the end, the shadow that extended over the legitimacy of Francisca's spiritual experiences hampered the financial and social sponsorship from influential friends that could have facilitated her reforming project.

²³⁰ Gaspar de Quiroga y Vela (Inquisitor General from 1573-94) and inquisitor Francisco Soto y Salazar (d. 1578) were Teresa's friends and supporters from inside the Inquisition. See Llamas, especially pages 45-6, 92, and 127. Some of Teresa's allies among the aristocracy were doña Luisa de la Cerda; Teresa de Laíz; and, initially, doña Ana de Mendoza, Princess of Eboli. See Weber's "Saint Teresa's Problematic Patrons." Carole Slade has demonstrated, against the widely accepted—although unsupported—tradition, the unlikelihood of a personal relation between Teresa and King Philip II. However, Slade acknowledges the strong support Philip gave to Teresa posthumously. Slade also mentions Roque de la Huerta, royal secretary, and the Count of Tendilla, member of the King's Council of State. Both of these men interceded to the king on Teresa's behalf, perhaps because Tendilla had a niece who entered one of Teresa's reformed convents, and Huerta's own daughter professed at Teresa's convent in Soria. There is evidence of at least 15 letters sent by Teresa to Roque de la Huerta. See "The Relationship between Teresa of Avila and Philip II," especially page 241. For the development of a cult around Teresa within the royal family, see Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Saint and Nation*, especially chapter 3.

Alison Weber has analyzed the critical value of Teresa's collaboration with her male counterparts; not only a number of her confessors, many of them prestigious theologians, but also other religious leaders with the reputation of being holy men, such as Peter of Alcántara. Teresa sought deliberately and avidly the endorsement of influential religious figures, including John of Ávila and Francis Borgia.²³¹ Francisca, in contrast, was ill equipped in terms of *letrados* who could guide her. She relied almost exclusively on Miguel Ruiz, her close friend and confessor who ended up being tried and imprisoned by the Inquisition along with her and Isabel. Miguel, a secular priest and not exactly an excelling theologian, fully believed Francisca's accounts of supernatural phenomena, but he failed to provide her with a doctrinal platform from which such experiences could be explained. Miguel started off as credulous, regarding Francisca's spiritual experiences, but soon became calculating, as he tried to dissociate himself from the *beata* by claiming he had gotten involved in her community by being the exorcist of both Francisca and Isabel, and by admitting he had been deceived. Miguel also brought in other clerics who nourished Francisca's idea that her reforming project was God's plan and thus, meant to be, such as Alonso López de la Cuadra, and the controversial friar Juan de Dios.

Weber has also identified the central function of rhetorical strategies in Teresa's writings. The rhetoric of femininity, as Weber has termed these strategic devices employed by the Carmelite, allowed Teresa to negotiate with religious authorities the authenticity of her spiritual experiences, her orthodoxy, and her submission to ecclesial authority, even as she led a vast reforming project (*Rhetoric*). I have argued here that Francisca used very similar rhetorical strategies to those of Teresa: she proclaimed her humility, she adopted common misogynistic tropes of her time, and she submitted to the authority of the inquisitor. Perhaps, the ineffectiveness of Francisca's defense

²³¹ See Weber, "Autoridad carismática, rutinización y las fronteras de género en el Carmelo Descalzo," especially pages 245-49.

could be better attributed to her situation than to her use (or lack) of rhetorical strategies. In other words, Francisca only came to acknowledge the possibility of having been deceived by the devil in the midst of an inquisitorial trial, after several witnesses had testified against her, and her credibility had been shattered. Instead, Teresa had purposely arranged her rhetorical strategies to prevent suspicions from the Inquisition. She sought reputed *letrados* who would teach her how to navigate the perilous language of discernment of spirits, and who would help her to craft a religious discourse that could serve as retaining wall for inquisitorial distrust.

The combination of all these variables paved the way for the Carmelite's success at convincing ecclesial authorities of the authenticity of her spiritual experiences. Teresa's remarkable ability to employ rhetorical strategies, her collaboration with male counterparts, her outstanding network of allies in positions of power, the strategic geographical location of her first reforming project, and to an extent, her personality, all played a role in securing the defense of the legitimacy of her visionary activity. Francisca lacked most of the resources she would have needed to succeed. For one thing, being a *beata* meant that she lacked the supervision of a religious order, and the protection that enclosure offered from public scandal. But she also was poorly mentored, shaped by the economic and religious tensions of Toledo, and even her use of rhetorical strategies could only happen in the context of an inquisitorial trial. Many of the witnesses that testified against her had been implicated in her reform and feared the consequences they could face for associating with Francisca. Their accounts reveal the *beata*'s confidence in the legitimacy of her visions, her unambiguous disapproval of the priesthood, and her deep concern for social justice.

Francisca was deeply touched by the economic hardships that Toledans were forced to endure, and her religious reform was a direct response to the unmet expectation that the Church would help to alleviate hunger, suffering, and poverty. In a letter sent to her sister, Francisca

lamented that “things are so wrong that it only seems as if God has commanded all of His priests to spend their income in taking pleasure, and to let the poor people die and let the sad maidens perish” (fol. 153r).²³² Francisca saw in Carranza a remedy to both the corruption of the church and the despair of the poor. She showed unequivocal signs of her intention to become a social and religious reformer, but she did not have the time nor the opportunity to do so. In contrast, Rowan Williams has affirmed that Teresa was not a social reformer, and Weber has agreed with this characterization (“Fortunes” 11). There is not much that points to Teresa’s interest for advancing social reforms, unless one considers her religious reforms as part of a wider social program. Weber has problematized this issue, given that Teresa did push for monastic reform, and “monasticism was not a marginal institution in sixteenth-century Catholic Europe” (12). Teresa specifically expressed disdain for the idea of *honra*, and she eliminated dowry as a requisite for aspiring nuns to enter her convents (11-12). But she did not question the unequal and inefficient hierarchies both inside and outside the church, and she did not push for the transformation of social structure. This, of course, made her a lesser threat to the *status quo* than Francisca.

Conclusion

The idea of deception is fundamental in the cases of Teresa and Francisca. As visionary women, they both stepped into a role that led them to inevitably confront the power of religious authorities. Ahlgren has pointed out regarding Francisca’s case —although it could be said of Teresa too—that it attests to the fact that “women’s charismatic power rooted in experiences of prayer needed to be controlled and regulated” (Apóstoles 35). This institutional urge to contest visionaries suggests that these women were perceived as indeed capable of denting the Church’s

²³² “Porque ya van las cosas tan en las heces que no parece sino que a todos los eclesiásticos les ha mandado Dios que gasten sus rentas en holgarse y dejen perecer los pobres y perder las tristes doncellas.”

command over religious discourse. In this context, the accusation of deception emerged as an obvious instrument that allowed ecclesial power to defend their monopoly of religious truth. Francisca and Teresa were repeatedly questioned on the legitimacy of their visionary activity. They responded by crafting a discourse on the discernment of spirits and religious authority. The guidance (or lack of it) from their male counterparts for this task proved essential to the success or failure of their defense.

Their faith in the divine nature of their visions put these women in a fragile position, as they were accused of being deceivers or deceived. And while Teresa succeeded at challenging accusations of deception, making a case for herself as a genuine visionary, Francisca, instead, was trialed and punished for being an *ilusa*, a deceived woman. The comparison between Francisca and Teresa has revealed that often visionary women themselves appealed to the concept of deception to dispute accusations of being deceivers. They either acknowledged the possibility of having been deceived by the devil, or at least considered their vulnerability to the devil's ability to disguise as an "angel of light". But this use of a rhetoric of deception was not always effective, as proven by Francisca's condemnation. Teresa's canonization and Francisca's sentence also reveal that these outcomes were the product of a complex combination of variables, including the visionaries' access to resources, timing, and even their geographical location. Despite all their similarities—from their efforts to advance religious reform, to their use of almost identical rhetorical strategies—these women ended up having diametrically opposing endings, which speak not solely to their individual capacity to challenge the discourse of religious authorities, but mainly to their own specific circumstances.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

My first time in Ávila in the fall of 2018 coincided with Teresa's 503rd birthday celebration and the first Teresian jubilee year in history. The city was full of pilgrims, eager to receive the indulgences granted by Pope Francis, and the white statue of her by the main gate, the Puerta del Alcázar, was covered with flowers that devotees from all over the world left on her lap. *Abulenses* of all ages refer to Teresa simply as *la Santa*, "the saint," with no need for specifics. The festive atmosphere and the familiar tone with which people speak of Teresa show that believers have kept a fervent love for her for over four centuries. But Teresa herself nor her contemporaries could have imagined such a categorical recognition of her holiness, or the definitive acceptance of her spirituality as part of the official discourse of the Catholic Church. This is why Teresa constitutes an extraordinary example of the agency and power of sixteenth-century visionary women. Her rhetorical strategies, her ability to secure allies in important positions within the Church and the aristocracy, and her own socio-economic background contributed to the successful defense of her legitimacy as visionary.

Throughout this research, I have tried to emphasize the fact that Teresa's canonization was entirely dependent on the institutional acceptance of her spiritual experiences as authentic gifts sent from God. And to secure this official recognition of the divine graces that she claimed to receive, Teresa had to redefine the very idea of deception. Furthermore, to negotiate with religious authorities the legitimacy of her spiritual visions, Teresa, her personal behavior, and her written work became the object of a complex and problematic discussion within the Catholic Church on the nature of female spirituality, deception, the applicability of the discernment of spirits, orthodoxy, and religious practices. Her path to sainthood was certainly not a straight line and Teresa was forced to meet what many times appeared to be unsurmountable obstacles.

Religious authorities during Teresa's time were not particularly welcoming of accounts of supernatural experiences. They used the idea of deception to counter claims of women who defied the institutionalized religious order by appealing directly to a voice of God that only they could hear. Deception could stem from the malicious intent of visionaries to gain fame and exert social and political influence by misleading the public. Or it could also be that women's weak nature inclined them to be fooled by their own bodily humors or by the devil. The discussion around deception in Spain's sixteenth century was, in fact, the result of a power struggle between visionary women and the ecclesial authorities they would often come to criticize. Teresa became credible and her visions emerged as authentic because of a number of different reasons that range from her effective use of rhetorical strategies to her ability to secure strategic allies. Her rhetorical devices pushed forward a redefinition of the idea of deception, and her strong religious leadership, mainly derived from her religious reform, put her in a position of power that enabled her to further argue in favor of her legitimacy as visionary.

This study of deception in Teresa of Ávila began with the examination of her historical context. I explained how Spain's sixteenth century opened with the religious reforms of Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros, who sponsored the publication of spiritual treatises, such as those of Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno, and who protected visionary women such as Madre Juana de la Cruz and Sor María de Santo Domingo (Howe 284-6). But the religious climate radically changed after Cisneros' death, and became even more restricted with the development of the Protestant Reformation, and decades later, with the introduction of Erasmianism to Spain, the spread of the heresy of *alumbradismo*, and the phenomenon of false visionaries, such as María de la Visitación and Magdalena de la Cruz. By the last three decades of the sixteenth century, the

Inquisition and ecclesial authorities had come to exert an impressive control over religious discourse.

One of the most effective tools that the Church used to respond to visionary women was the discourse on the discernment of spirits. This method assessed the legitimacy of visionaries, based primarily on their personal behavior, but also on the mastery of sophisticated theological notions that women could only learn from their confessors. Teresa's interest in collaborating with prestigious theologians was essential for her successful navigation of the discernment of spirits. Remarkably, she developed her own version of this method and used it to manage cases of visionary nuns in her reformed convents. Teresa feared that rumors of supernatural phenomena among members of her newly founded order could endanger the entire reform. She put prioresses in charge of these happenings, with the intervention of only trusted confessors, and explained visions as the result of the weak female nature, particularly in relation to bodily humors and melancholy. In doing so, Teresa forcefully rejected the idea that women were deceivers, but conceded that the female nature made it easier for women to be self-deceived. She also rejected theologian and discernment of spirits scholar Jean Gerson's idea that women were not capable of distinguishing true from false revelations, as she named herself and her prioresses as first rulers of any visionary activity in her reformed convents (Elliott 29).

Despite the tight grip of church officials on visionary activity, Teresa was able to successfully defend the authenticity of her religious experience. She profited from the numerous debates that were happening inside the Church, and benefitted from the evident divisions among rivaling ecclesial factions. For instance, she sided with *espirituales*, a group of clerics that embraced spiritual practices such as mental prayer and *recogimiento*. *Espirituales* opposed the rigid interpretation of orthodoxy that championed *letrados*, many of whom suspected all kinds of

supernatural phenomena. In her effort to secure the authenticity of her visionary experience, Teresa expressed the need to resort to confessors who would be excelling theologians or *letrados*, but she explained that certain matters about prayer could only be fully understood by those who had experience of it, thus defending the work of *espirituales*.

Teresa's resourcefulness in upholding her legitimacy as visionary amidst unfavorable circumstances is evident in her elaboration of an intricate rhetoric of deception. In dismantling traditional ways of understanding religious concepts such as obedience, humility, and doubt, Teresa appropriated theological language to create an effective defense of her visions. She employed a wide variety of articulated strategies, explanations, and rhetorical resources to distance herself from deception. Her conscious rhetoric, plagued with redefinitions and with the negotiation of meanings with religious authorities, suggests that she wrote for potentially suspicious readers, and she likely tried to anticipate accusations of deception against her. These charges effectively reached the Inquisition at various points during her life and even years after her death.

For Teresa's accusers, several of her propositions on spirituality and her accounts of visions and raptures posed the threat of deception. Alonso de la Fuente, Juan de Orellana, Juan de Lorenzana, and Francisco de Pisa, the four men who sent official accusations to the Inquisition against Teresa, worried that her books could lead other believers, and particularly women, to being victims of the devil's deceit. The fear of deception was such that it became the justification to request the banning of Teresa's written works. Yet, despite their unequivocal opposition to the circulation of her writings, the accusers had a far more ambiguous opinion of Teresa herself. By the time these men had sent their accusatory letters to the Inquisition, Teresa's reputation for holiness was increasing among the general public. There were rumors circulating about the incorruptibility of her body and many devotees were attributing miracles to her. To an extent, it is

possible that the religious fervor of Teresa's followers and the support she had amongst important members of the nobility and clergy hindered a more definitive condemnation of Teresa. For the most part, her accusers conceded that rather than a deceiver, Teresa was likely deceived by the devil, and had no intention of causing harm. However, her books continued to spread deception, like poison, and so accusers sought to obtain their prohibition.

Finally, the comparison between Teresa and Francisca de los Apóstoles shed light on the limits and effects of the rhetoric of deception. I have argued that Francisca used very similar rhetorical strategies to those of Teresa: she proclaimed her humility, she adopted common misogynistic tropes of her time, and she submitted to the authority of the inquisitor. Both of these women even shared a similar interpretation of their spiritual visions, including the five principles that Gillian Ahlgren has identified: visions were non-corporeal; visions filled visionaries with joy and peace; visions did not depend on the merit of the visionary; visions motivated visionaries to pursue virtuous behavior, and; visions made visionaries more loving of God and others (Apóstoles 21). These five principles align with what were deemed as true revelations from the perspective of the discernment of spirits. They also reveal that Teresa and Francisca were both aware of the suspicions that their visions stirred among religious authorities.

The ineffectiveness of Francisca's defense perhaps could be better attributed to her situation than to her use (or lack) of rhetorical strategies. For one thing, Francisca only acknowledged the possibility of having been deceived by the devil in the midst of an inquisitorial trial, after over twenty witnesses had testified against her, and her credibility had been severely damaged. In contrast, Teresa had arranged her rhetorical strategies precisely with the goal of preventing suspicions from the Inquisition. She sought reliable theologians who would teach her how to navigate the perilous language of discernment of spirits, and who would help her to craft a

religious discourse that could lessen the mistrust of inquisitorial authorities. Francisca, in contrast, relied mostly on her confessor Miguel Ruiz, a man who proved to be naïve and inexperienced in handling visionary penitents. Teresa also demonstrated a remarkable ability to secure allies within the aristocracy and the Church, while Francisca was not able to gain many supporters, and rapidly lost the ones she had initially made. In fact, many of the women whom she had once persuaded to join her religious community later testified against her to the Inquisition, while the religious men that had endorsed her reforming project ended up confessing they had been deceived, and even blaming their deception on Francisca's demonic possession.

Although Francisca and Teresa were both repeatedly questioned on the legitimacy of their visionary activity, and although they responded to this interrogation in a very similar fashion, they ended up facing entirely different fates. They both crafted a rhetoric of deception, they submitted to the authority of their male superiors, and they resorted to an interpretation of their visions that would conform to the discourse on the discernment of spirits. But other elements proved to be crucial in determining the success or failure of their defense as authentic visionaries. In this sense, I have specifically pointed out the significance of the guidance from theologians and confessors, the timing of their respective defenses, their access to resources such as supporters in strategic positions of power, their location in towns that were more or less familiarized with religious reform, and even their own socio-economic background as key variables that helped to shape the fates of Teresa and Francisca.

Deception remained at the core of religious discourse in sixteenth-century Spain, particularly in the face of visionary activity. Religious authorities as much as visionary women used the idea of deception to either dictate or challenge the dominant religious discourse. Deception was often redefined in a process of negotiation that favored some visionary women, but

that decidedly condemned others. This process was often arbitrary, given the discussions that were happening within ecclesial power, and the multiple variables that could come into play when the Inquisition or other religious authorities tried to regulate the impact of accounts of visionary women on the general public. Multiple elements, perhaps more than those I have addressed in the course of this research, came together to ensure that Teresa of Ávila could succeed at convincing ecclesial authorities of the legitimacy of her experiences. This was a mandatory step in paving the way for her canonization.

Ultimately, this research intended to reflect on how accounts of supernatural phenomena have traditionally been approached from the framework of deception, and how visionaries are often forced to hustle for the legitimacy of their spiritual experiences. When visionary women fail to present proof of the divine gifts they claim to receive after the demands of religious or scientific authorities, their voices are silenced or dismissed. The interest of the rulers of social discourse in ignoring the voices of visionary women signals the urgency of including their stories in the larger discussion on the credibility of women's accounts of their own life experiences. Deception, when directed against women who speak their personal truth, functions as a tool of social and political marginalization. This analysis of Teresa of Ávila as a visionary woman who felt the need to confront the problem of deception questions the usefulness of the traditional interpretation of visionary women as either deceivers or deceived. It also suggests that in stepping away from the framework of deception, we may better come to appreciate and understand the wide diversity of the human experience.

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