

## Article

# Ventriloquial Acts in Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda's *Mística Ciudad de Dios*

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**Abstract:** Sor María de Ágreda (1602–1665), a Franciscan nun and Abbess of the Conceptionist monastery at Ágreda, was a prolific writer whose theological works are yet to be extensively studied. In this article, I examine the practice of divine ventriloquism in Sor María's mystical (auto)biography of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, *Mística ciudad de Dios* (1670). I aim to examine the complexity inherent in Sor María's 'unmediated' ventriloquizing of sacred voices and the positionality and power appropriated through this act. The argument focuses on the use of the ventriloquial mechanism, its relationship to Sor María's authorial position, and how readers may conceptualize the production and reception of the sacred voice. The textual performance with which readers are presented in *Mística ciudad de Dios* provides a rich example of how women religious writers appropriated divine authority, resulting in a complex position of agency and self-fashioned individuality.

**Keywords:** Sor María de Ágreda; divine ventriloquism; mystical revelation; *Vitae Mariae*; *Mística ciudad de Dios*; early modern religious women's writing



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## Ventriloquial Acts in Sor María de Ágreda's *Mística Ciudad de Dios*

Sor María de Ágreda (1602–1665), a Franciscan nun and Abbess of the Conceptionist monastery at Ágreda, is known to religious scholars, cultural critics, and historians as a prominent figure—perhaps only second to Teresa of Ávila—among Spanish early modern women religious writers.<sup>1</sup> While enclosed for most of her life in the convent she, her mother, and sister founded, Sor María was recognized from a very young age for her visionary experiences, her mystical bilocation to New Mexico, her extensive epistolary exchange with members of the court, and her prolific writing of theological texts. Given the institutionalized silencing backed by the Pauline dictum and the limitations imposed by the post-Council of Trent's cloistering of all consecrated women, Sor María was subjected to patriarchal religious and cultural pressures that questioned, scrutinized, and curtailed her spiritual and intellectual practices, what Antonio Castillo López (2006) calls a “libertad vigilada”/scrutinized liberty (Castillo López 2006, p. 186). Castillo López's (2006) analysis takes this line of thought further by arguing that, given the “función coercitiva de la tutela y el control ejercido (por los confesores)”/coercive function of the oversight and control exercised (by confessors), Sor María can only write because she positions herself as an emptied vessel or “pluma de Dios” pen of God (Castillo López 2006, p. 186). Therefore, Sor María rhetorically avoids a direct imposition of authority or agency by framing her intellect and writings as a transparent conduit for divine revelation: “En este contexto, solo la revelación podía legitimar la toma de la palabra escrita. La autorización divina ofrecía la oportunidad de transgredir la segregación impuesta por el sistema de géneros [. . .].” In this context, only divine revelation could legitimize the use of the written Word. Divine authority offered the opportunity to transgress the segregation imposed by a gendered system [. . .] (Castillo López 2006, p. 192). On the other hand, feminist critics such as Julia Lewandowska (2019) and Ana Morte Ancín (2010) argue for an alternative approach that privileges Sor María's spiritual and textual authority as a chosen mediator and interpreter

of divine revelation, even if the nun's agency had to contend with the limits imposed by confessors and inquisitors. In what follows, I advance this second critical line of inquiry by focusing on Sor María's reproduction of divine voices and the adoption of a narrativized mystery of Mary's conception and sanctified life revealed exclusively to her by God and the Virgin as demonstrated in *Mística ciudad de Dios* (1670).<sup>2</sup>

In the Introduction and Book One of Part I, Sor María fully establishes the foundation for what I will call 'divine ventriloquizing', adopting the position of a mediumistic vessel for God and the Virgin's voices, with Christ and the angels occasionally also asserting an oral presence:

*Estos y otros avisos me dieron el Altísimo y la Reina, para manifestarme su voluntad en esta obra. Y me pareció temeridad, y poca caridad conmigo misma no admitir la doctrina y enseñanza que esta gran Señora ha prometido darme en el discurso de su santísima vida: y tampoco me pareció convenida dilatarlo para otro tiempo, porque el Altísimo me manifestó ser este el oportuno y conveniente, y sobre ello me dijo estas palabras: Hija mía [...].* (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Libro. I, Capítulo I, Sección 9, p. 365)

These and other warnings were given to me by the Most High and the Queen because they want to manifest their will to me in this work. And it seemed to me foolhardy, and of little charity to myself, not to admit the doctrine and teaching that this great Lady has promised to give me in the telling of her most holy life: and neither did it seem fitting to me to postpone it for another time, because the Most High manifested to me that this was the opportune and convenient time, and about it he said these words to me: My daughter [...]. (Ágreda [1670] 1860)

Given the length (three parts with over eight hundred pages, depending on the edition) and scope (documenting the life of the Virgin from before the creation of the world to her ascension) of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, the recurrent ventriloqual mechanism not only confirms Sor María's divine inspiration but also functions as a narrative element providing a constant set of interlocutors for Sor María. Clark Colahan (1994), whose *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda* first formally introduced the *santa viva's* writings to American scholars, speaks of "supernatural inspiration" (p. 2), characterizing the voices that appear in *Mística ciudad de Dios* as the "way Sor María externalized and expanded on her feelings about herself" (p. 135). Framing this identitary function, the ventriloqual interventions take on the form of theological discussions motivated by Sor María, who asks a question or posits a need for corroboration or clarification that is then duly addressed by one of the heavenly voices. The text is thus replete with frequent 'unmediated' interventions of divine voices, most notably the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception who remarks on theological and biographical points of interest in the first person, superseding Sor María's own voice and emerging unobstructed from the text: *diré [yo, Sor María], como pudiere, lo que se me respondió, y manifesto*/I, Sor María, will state how they responded and what was manifested to the best of my ability. (Ágreda, Tomo I. Libro I. Parte I, Capítulo III, Sección 33, p. 377). As such, this narrative structure carves out a textual space that claims direct transmission of sacred speech acts. The voices speak to Sor María and, through her text, to the readers who are invited to imagine hearing these voices tell heretofore unknown details of Mary's existence *ab initio* (from the beginning of time). Moreover, they reveal the theological and spiritual truth of Mary's immaculacy, which the Franciscan nun expertly expounds upon in her own voice through lengthy scriptural and hagiographical elucidations. Sor María's telling of Mary's life and the exegetical excursions of biblical passages and theological elements are intertwined in dialogue with divine interlocutors, enveloping the reader in an exchange that is both transcendent and intimate: "Hija mía, el mundo está muy necesitado de esta doctrina"/My daughter, the world is much in need of this doctrine. (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo I, Sección 9, p. 365). Given this textual dynamic, we can establish an interpretative and theoretical framework for the identitary complexity inherent in Sor María's 'unmediated' ventriloquizing of sacred voices and the positionality afforded by and power appropriated through this mechanism. In what follows, I focus on the use and

effect of the ventriloquial mechanism and its importance on Sor María's authorial position. I am likewise interested in examining how readers may relate to Sor María's singular voice and experience their own imaginary relationship to the mediumistic textual act with which they are presented in *Mística ciudad de Dios*.

Steven Connor (2001) offers a comprehensive study on the topic in his seminal *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, in which he analyzes ventriloquial phenomena associated with glossolalia (the phenomenon of speaking in an unknown language, especially in religious worship), ecstatic speaking among female mystics, and the hearing of divine voices throughout Christian history. In *Divine Ventriloquism in English Medieval Literature*, Mary Hayes (2011) delves specifically into the dynamics of divine ventriloquism in the pre-modern area both for the speaker/writer and the audience that is asked to hear the voice of God and accept the presence of God through the voice/text of a human interlocutor, "[p]erhaps most obviously, [...] the role of priests, who spoke for God when they preached, instructed sinners in confession, and performed the liturgy" (Hayes 2011, p. 1). As indicated by Hayes (2011), the mechanism of textual ventriloquism offers a distinct set of parameters absent from mediated/interpreted revelation and the mostly untransmissible mystical interior locution:

The divine speaker's voice can be stored in writing [by the author] and, when played back by a reader, conjure his living presence. Here the reader performs as does a phonograph: mediating rather than usurping the power of the creative, mystical entity behind it. (Hayes 2011, p. 41)

Sacred voices are thus inscribed, heard, and made present textually and audibly in repeatable reading acts. Hayes's study focuses on medieval England and the ventriloquial mechanism deployed by the male clergy and other male interlocutors. Nevertheless, the critic's approach is guided by a more general consideration of power and authority: those understood as legitimate "chosen messengers" hold the privilege of being listened to by those not deemed worthy vessels for the Word (Hayes 2011, p. 2). These relationships are neither synchronically nor diachronically static. In fact, the history of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations can be described as a probing of who could appropriately "mediate the divine voice" (Hayes 2011, p. 2) and broker "divine power" (Hayes 2011, p. 9). In the late medieval and early modern periods, an emergence of non-normative bodies and spaces subverted an almost exclusive clerical hold on the ventriloquial act, participating in what Hayes calls a "story of power, anxiety, and subversion centered on the divine voice, which [...] functioned as an avatar for spiritual as well as mundane power relationships" (Hayes 2011, p. 2). It is for this reason that the critic concludes her book with the following assertion:

Although my study has limited itself to implied clerical ventriloquial performances [...], the notion of ventriloquism could be usefully extended [...]. *Mystical revelations, for instance, in which the religious person acts as a medium for the divine voice, would be a fruitful field of inquiry.* (Hayes 2011, p. 194; emphasis mine)

Even though in this final interpretative invitation Hayes points to English medieval female mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, the general conceptual framework can be productively extended to the writings of late medieval and early modern Spanish visionaries who took it upon themselves to "serve as the designated organs for the divine voice" (Hayes 2011, p. 194).<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the specific Spanish early modern post-Tridentine context, León Carlos Álvarez Santaló (2005) has examined similar phenomena grounded on the claim of "revelaciones"/revelations transcribed in a text so that the reader is obligated to accept them—graphically and spiritually—as a literal transcription of the supernatural voice, or what he has labeled as, "la palabra sobrenatural neta"/the supernatural Word in its transparent totality (Álvarez Santaló 2005, p. 170).<sup>4</sup> Taking Sor María as one of his primary examples, the critic examines the implications of the ventriloquial strategy in religious women writers in seventeenth-century Spain, focusing on how "discursos literales de la divinidad"/literal

discourses of divinity seek to wield textual, spiritual, and personal authority despite the mechanisms of orthodoxy, censure, and control that framed religious women's lives during this period (Álvarez Santaló 2005, p. 185):<sup>5</sup>

*De igual importancia, y, con mucha frecuencia, de mayor, es conseguir el respeto, el miedo, el interés y la aquiescencia de confesores o directores de espíritu sobre lo que en tales textos se exija, indique, afirme, adoctrine o lamente. El mecanismo psicológico de la protagonista, beneficiaria de tales discursos “revelados” es tan simple que ni siquiera exige una intención torcida [. . .]: tanto la mera tendencia subconsciente, en la vidente, de hacerse importante y de que se escuche y ‘obedezca’ su voz, como unos objetivos de mejora de estatus (espiritual, conventual, social y hasta ‘político’), bastarían para dar paso a estos mensajes nítidos sobre quién es quién en los textos ‘revelados’.* (Álvarez Santaló 2005, p. 185)

Of equal and often greater importance is to obtain the respect, fear, interest, and acquiescence of confessors or spiritual directors on what in such texts is demanded, indicated, affirmed, indoctrinated, or lamented. The psychological mechanism of the protagonist, the beneficiary of such ‘revealed’ discourses, is so simple that it does not even require a twisted intention [. . .]: both the mere subconscious tendency in the visionary to make herself important and have her voice heard and ‘obeyed’, as well as the intent to improve her status (spiritual, conventual, social and even ‘political’), would suffice to give way to these evident messages about who is who in the ‘revealed’ texts.

Revealed texts position the female visionary as a chosen vessel and differentiate her, whether consciously or not, as an intellectual, spiritual, and physical site worthy of the sacred, a “quién es quién” amongst the many who would like to claim religious privilege. Ana Morte Ancín (2015), whose study is in part dedicated to Sor María asserts a similar claim when considering women mystics and *santas vivas* in the post-Trent period:

*Lo que planteo aquí es que una parte de la respuesta podría ser que la existencia de una tradición, especialmente constatable en la Edad Media, que otorgaba poder y autoridad a ciertas mujeres, seguía viva y presente en la mentalidad colectiva después de Trento a pesar de no encontrar referentes en los mensajes y modelos propuestos oficialmente.* (Morte Ancín 2015, p. 300)

What I propose here is that part of the answer could be that the existence of a tradition, especially verifiable in the Middle Ages, that granted power and authority to certain women was still alive and present in the collective mentality after Trent, despite not finding references in the officially proposed messages and models.

Along the same line, María Morrás (2015) speaks about the liminal and mediating character that Spanish early modern religious women possessed despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the official discourses and social structures that limited their power:

*[L]as mujeres estaban excluidas del poder, pero a diferencia de otras minorías o grupos marginales —entre las que podría incluírselas desde un punto de vista conceptual—, por su número y por su presencia transversal en todos los grupos sociales, puede afirmarse que se situaban al mismo tiempo dentro y fuera de los ámbitos de autoridad (Cattani, Ferriani y Allison 2014). Este carácter en cierto sentido liminar (cf. Bynum 1984) conforma un terreno común entre mujeres y santos, pues a ambos se les ha atribuido tradicionalmente el papel de mediadores: entre facciones enemigas, entre los poderosos y el pueblo menudo, entre lo corpóreo y lo espiritual, entre el cielo y la tierra, entre la divinidad y los hombres.* (Morrás 2015, p. 10; emphasis mine)

Women were excluded from power, but unlike other minorities or marginalized groups—within which they could be included from a conceptual point of view—their numbers and transversal presence in all social groups allows us to say that they were located at the same time inside and outside the spheres of authority

(Cattani, Ferriani and Allison, 2014). This character, in a certain sense liminal (cf. Bynum 1984), fashions a common ground between women and saints since both have traditionally been attributed the role of mediators: between enemy factions, between the powerful and the common people, between the corporeal and the spiritual, between heaven and earth, between divinity and humankind.

Mercedes Alcalá-Galán (2015) has, in turn, emphasized how religious women's writing was linked with the miraculous and the non-normative and coextensively with the divine power: "La escritura no se normaliza con su cotidianeidad, sino que en sí misma se convierte en objeto, en milagro [...] como la prueba del poder de Dios"/Writing is not normalized because of its daily presence but becomes in itself an object, a miracle [...] the proof of God's power. (Alcalá-Galán 2015, p. 639). Alcalá-Galán (2015) thus concludes, "frecuentemente se da un inequívoco extrañamiento ante la escritura que termina por convertirse en una suerte de metaescritura imbricada de elementos sobrenaturales y milagrosos. La propia escritura se transforma en un fenómeno prodigioso"/There is often an unmistakable estrangement in writing that ends up becoming a kind of meta-writing interwoven with supernatural and miraculous elements. Writing itself becomes a prodigious phenomenon (Alcalá-Galán 2015, p. 657). Even if these critics do not refer specifically to the conceptual and theoretical framework of ventriloquism as defined by Connor and Hayes, they clearly delineate a pathway for this approach in the study of religious women writers in Spain beyond the medieval period. It is my contention, therefore, that the analysis of the effects of the ventriloquized divine in the works of Spanish early modern religious women, and specifically *Mística ciudad de Dios*, offers a valuable approach to the dynamics of identification, the claim to immediacy, authority, power, the construction of female selfhood, and audience reception within the context of post-Trent orthodoxy, religiosity, and the reform of the convents.

To this point, Mother Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534) provides an important Spanish precedent for Sor María's textual ventriloquism. Abbess at the Santa María de la Cruz convent in Cubas, Juana de la Cruz experienced ecstatic raptures during her sermons for thirteen consecutive years. As Jessica Boon (2016) expertly explains,

Her regal and religious audience heard a low-register voice issue forth from her unconscious, prone body, using the first person to narrate elaborate additions to biblical episodes. The voice then detailed the complex pageants and festivals the rapt Juana was observing in heaven during the many hours she lent her voice to Christ. (Boon 2016, Introduction p. 1)

Claiming the elocutionary position of prophet preacher (which finds its theological justification in Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*), Juana de la Cruz performs as a chosen material medium for divine voices.<sup>6</sup> (Thomas Aquinas 2012). The sermons—retold and organized in written form by María Evangelista (a fellow nun who miraculously learned to read and write so that she could faithfully copy the sermons)—*El libro del Conorte* (1534) textually authenticates the *santa's* oral visionary prophetic and ventriloquial role as "a mediator for Christ's voice" (Boon 2016, Introduction p. 4). The reader, in turn, is presented with Juana de la Cruz's ventriloquial acts, brought to life by María Evangelista's and other nuns' and confessors' reconstruction of dictated texts and their memories of the *santa's* sacred performance.<sup>7</sup> In addition to *El libro del Conorte*, convent documents such as the *Vida y fin* and *El libro la casa* record similar conversations with God and the Virgin in her role as intercessor.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, witnessed by her weekly audience and as documented by the convent community, Juana's authority resides in the public enactment of the voice of Christ inserted in a sermon with "the immediate impact of its liturgical and theological implications" (Boon 2016, Introduction p. 5).<sup>9</sup> Throughout the thirteen years of her visionary preaching, Juana de la Cruz was heard and followed by an audience of faithful that at times included "bishops, army captains, and even the emperor Charles V" (Boon 2016, Introduction p. 1). Sacred public ventriloquism thus made it possible for a lowly woman turned *santa viva* to proffer authoritative guidance on what it

meant here on earth and in heaven to partake of the grace of God, skirting a patriarchal silencing that was supposed to impose oversight and control.<sup>10</sup>

As a *santa viva* herself, Sor María navigates a similar terrain to that of Juana de la Cruz, chosen and filled by the power and authority vested by the divine voice. Nevertheless, *Mística ciudad de Dios* represents a development in the effect of ventriloquial strategies. In addition to a holy sanctioning of the mystical experience (as presented in *El libro del Conorte*), divine ventriloquism in Sor María's text explicitly scaffolds and secures her identity, authorial, and theological aspirations. Sourced from her visions, Sor María authors an (auto)biography of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception in which Mary tells and examines her life story with the nun. Within this larger textual structure, Sor María's mediumistic practice is structurally incorporated in a carefully composed exegetical treatise addressing Franciscan and Dominican debates on immaculacy while positioning herself as a chosen author and versed theologian. The torrid history of the production of *Mística ciudad de Dios*—allegedly composed, burned, and rewritten—is likewise evoked by a polyphony of heavenly voices that dictate the text's initial production and later reproduction. In 1650 Sor María is called for a second inquisitorial interview (the first triggered in 1635 by the account of her bilocation), an event that, as retold in the 'redrafted' manuscript, led her confessor to require that she burn the original manuscript of *Mística ciudad de Dios*:

*Hasta el año mil seiscientos treinta y siete, que comencé a escribir la primera vez. Y en acabándola, por los temores y tribulaciones dichas, y por consejo de un confesor, que me asistía, (en ausencia del principal que me gobernaba), quemé todos los papeles, y otros muchos, así de esta sagrada Historia, como de otras materias graves, y misteriosas. Porque me dixo: que las mujeres no habían de escribir en la Santa Iglesia. (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Libro I, Introducción, Sección 19, pp. 356–57)*

In the year one thousand six hundred and thirty-seven, I began to write for the first time. And in finishing the first copy, because of the fears and tribulations I have mentioned, and on the advice of a confessor who assisted me (in the absence of my principal confessor who governed me), I burned all my papers, and many others, as well as the sacred History of other serious and mysterious matters. Because he said to me: women are not to write in the Holy Church.

The specific context surrounding the alleged destruction and rewriting of the manuscript and the location of the multiple copies circulating—including one kept by Philip IV at his desk—are not the focus of this study. What is pertinent is how divine ventriloquism plays a vital role in the official rewriting and expansion of the original 'destroyed' text. God the Son, the Word made flesh (an act of ventriloquism in itself in that Christ speaks/is the vessel for the words of the Father), tells Sor María to compose once again *Mística ciudad de Dios*, declaring her the privileged interlocutor for the presentation of this most sacred mystery: "Por sola su Misericordia me dijo: No desmayes hija [. . .] escríbela segunda vez, para que pongas lo que falta, y imprimas en tu corazón su doctrina: y no irrites más mi justicia, ni desobligues a mi Misericordia, quemando lo que escribes, porque mi indignación no quite de ti la luz [. . .] que te he dado para conocer y manifestar estos Misterios" / By his Mercy alone, he said to me: Do not be faint my daughter [. . .] write it a second time so that you may add what is lacking and imprint in your heart her (the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception's) doctrine: and do not irritate my justice anymore nor disoblige my Mercy burning what you write so that my indignation does not take away from you the light [. . .] that I have given you to know and manifest these Mysteries (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Introducción, Sección 16, p. 355). The Virgin quickly seconds the mandate, "para que en mi nombre, y con mi dirección, y asistencia escribes segunda vez" / So that in my name, and with my address and assistance, you may write a second time (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Introducción, Sección 17, p. 355), thus preempting and hopefully incapacitating from the opening segments of the new version any future condemnation from confessors and inquisitors. Against Sor María's confessor's warning that "las mujeres no habían de escribir en la Santa Iglesia", the textually recorded voices of God (both Father and Son) and the

Virgin Mary require that the Franciscan nun privilege above all else the revealed truth to which she has been made privy, speak to the mystery of immaculacy, and examine the transcendental conditions of Mary's existence. Divine voices are made present to Sor María and through Sor María's text to readers who devotedly imagine those voices through the act of reading, whether in silence or read out loud in a communal setting. Against the suspicions of wary confessors, the destruction of this 'new' *Mística ciudad de Dios* would be, by extension, the destruction of the divine word.

As noted above, critics have documented how the ventriloquial structure works when visionary writers claim to be filled by the Word. The oral or textual reproduction of the divine voice necessitates an intelligible and sanctioned format. Especially when we study female mystics, their voices and points of view are fixed as wholly subordinate to the authority of the divine male voice and the male confessor that properly records the experience, making the woman visionary (at least formally) a pure emptied mediumistic vessel. As explained by Connor (2001),

This pattern is met with repeatedly in accounts of late medieval mystical or ecstatic experience. The pure utterance [...] is the guarantee of transcendence, of a meaning and a truth that comes from beyond time and the individual body; [...] The sublation or bypassing of time and the body also cuts out any possibility of dialogue and response. For the most part these mystical voices are simply heard, and reechoed, without questions, response, qualification, or enlargement. (Connor 2001, p. 110)

*Mística ciudad de Dios*, on the other hand, offers a radically different model. Throughout the text, Sor María describes the mystical encounter and source of her writing as "*ciencia infusa*" / infused science, the immediate, holistic, and perfect knowledge held by the divine (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Libro I, Introducción, Sección 17, p. 355). The receiving and retelling of this *ciencia* are critical to the theological framework of the text and Sor María's spiritual and authorial positionality. Once Sor María establishes in the introduction and the first chapter of Book One the holy call to write and the sacred rationale for this call, she strategically incorporates first-person interlocutors into the fabric of her theological account as a mechanism to advance further the exegetical and doctrinal knowledge she wishes to impart. As previously indicated, ventriloquism in *Mística ciudad de Dios* delivers a dialogic collective communication. Sacred voices dialogue with Sor María and through her text to the reader. Most importantly, these voices are guided by her, responding to her apprehensions, replying to her queries, reacting to her assertions, and expanding upon her theological explanations. Her voice prompts and is prompted by the ventriloquized divine voices, and they over and again validate her speech and the hermeneutical practice of the text:

*Y en este grado más inferior veo, hablo, y entiendo a los Santos Príncipes; conversan conmigo, y me dan muchos de los Misterios, que el Señor me ha mostrado: Y la Reina de el Cielo me declara, y manifiesta los de su Santísima vida, y los sucesos admirables de ella: y con distinción conozco a cada una de estas Personas por sí, sintiendo de los efectos Divinos, que cada cual, respectivamente hace el alma.* (Ágreda, Tomo I, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo II, Sección 22, p. 372)

And in this, my lowly status, I see, speak, and understand the Holy Princes; they converse with me and reveal to me many of the Mysteries that the Lord wishes to show me: And the Queen of Heaven declares to me and manifests those (mysteries) of her most holy life and the admirable events of it: and I know each of these (Holy) Persons distinctly via themselves, experiencing the Divine effects that each, respectively, has on my soul.

The power of the sacred voice is transferred to and mediated by Sor María, simultaneously a vehicle for and a producer of divine truth. Overlapping the immediacy of her experience with the creation of her selfhood, the nun emerges from the text as the voice through which all heavenly voices interconnect and order the world.

Moreover, as evinced by this same segment, the gendered balance of power in *Mística ciudad de Dios* is anchored on the figure of the Virgin as Sor María's principal and most fervent interlocutor. The cultural and theological association of the Virgin with sacred speech is linked to her status as the mother of God. Hayes (2011) remarks how, from the origins of the Church, the Incarnation of Christ in the body of Mary had been associated with *Pythia*, whose oracle came forth from her womb: "[H]er [*Pythia's*] delivery of oracles from Apollo seemed a base parody of the Virgin Mary's birth of the Word. Indeed, we can see a similarity in the two stories, as the virgin birth resulted from the Annunciation; God's speech mediated by the angel impregnated Mary" (pp. 3–4). The Incarnation of the Word can thus be structurally conceived as a double or even triple layering of ventriloquial acts, divine speech displaced from heaven and spoken in and through the apparition of the angel Gabriel, the body of Christ, and the womb of Mary: "Christ's Incarnation is itself, strictly speaking, a ventriloquial act, as he emanates as the Word from the body of the Virgin Mary" (Hayes 2011, p. 9).

Consequently, by the late medieval and early modern period—and as visually demonstrated in countless visual representations of the Annunciation—the Virgin is firmly positioned as the "carrier of the Word" (Connor 2001, p. 95), the Word incarnated in the body of Christ and implanted in her womb via the ventriloquized speech of the Holy Spirit, to be brought forth and fully articulated in the virgin birth. As I have noted elsewhere, in *Mística ciudad de Dios* the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception acquires a specific and immutable bond to the Word as "Madre del Verbo Humanado", a designation that seems to appear only in Sor María's text and in which Mary is figured, "as an extension of the holy Trinity, always already present in her relation to the Word, from the beginning of time and incarnated into time" (Hernández 2019, p. 180). Sor María posits Mary theologically as the timeless mother and originary site where the Word first and always already resided. The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception's voice is inextricably linked to the Word before and after the Incarnation and, thus, can be understood as an extension of the Word in its eternal iteration. In *Mística ciudad de Dios*, Mary is accordingly treated with the same regard as the voice of God. As the account of her life develops, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception's voice becomes ubiquitous, listening to her devotee's theological discourse and exegetical exercises and responding to her 'daughter's' queries at the end of every chapter:

*Y como esta gran Señora es fidelísima en sus palabras, asistiéndome siempre con su preferencia Divina al tiempo de declararme estos Misterios, ha comenzado a desempeñarla en este capítulo; y prevenir para hacerlo en lo restante, que fuere escribiendo. Y guardare este orden, y estilo, que al fin de el capítulo escribiré lo que me enseñare su Alteza, como lo ha hecho ahora hablándome en esta forma. Hija mía [. . .] (Ágreda, Tomo II, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo XVI, Sección 237, p. 96)*

And as this great Lady is most faithful in her words, always assisting me with her Divine preference when declaring to me these Mysteries, which she has begun to tell in this chapter; and I foresee that she will continue in the rest so that I continue to write. And I will keep this order and style: at the end of each chapter, I will write what Your Highness will teach me, as you have now done by speaking to me in this way. *My daughter* [. . .].

Through this dialogic ventriloquial act, Divine Mother and religious woman together render the sacred hermeneutical truth of Mary's exceptionality, reciprocally authorizing their voices and propositions. Their positionality is thus made structurally compatible. As proven in the theological discourse of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, eternal and never touched by sin, is co-extensive to the Holy Trinity. In turn, Sor María, a visionary chosen by God and the Virgin to explain the mystery of immaculacy, is in the company of and furthers the work of a cadre of Church fathers and theologians whom God had previously chosen to demonstrate the sacred mystery of the *tota pulchra*.

However, in this instance, the voice of the Virgin and the Word of God directly intervene and dictate, figuratively incarnated, in the text of a woman religious.

A related aspect to consider in *Mística ciudad de Dios* is the materiality acquired by the ventriloquized voice, what Connor calls the ‘vocalic body’. As the critic explains, “Voices are produced by bodies, but can also themselves produce bodies” (Connor 2001, p. 35). In other words, the ventriloquial paradigm produces an imaginary physical materiality because we, the readers of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, seek to attach bodies to voices:

The vocalic body is the idea—which can take the form of a dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine, or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body [. . .]. Our assumption that the object is speaking allows its voice to assume that body, in the theatrical or even theological sense, as an actor assumes a role, or as the divinity assumes incarnate form; not just to enter and suffuse it, but to produce it. In bald actuality, it is we who assign voices to objects; phenomenologically, *the fact that an unassigned voice must always imply a body means that it will always partly supply it as well* [. . .]. What characterizes a vocalic body is not merely the range of actions which a particular voice-function enjoins on the body of the one producing the voice, but also the characteristic way in which the voice seems to precipitate itself as an object, upon which it can then itself give the illusion of acting. (Connor 2001, pp. 35–36)

In *Mística ciudad de Dios*, these phantasmatic bodies—and most notably that of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception—appear embodied alongside Sor María, who as characters in a shared narrative lend themselves to an imaginary visual and material experience; the reader ‘hears’ the Virgin’s voice and, therefore, is led to imagine the image/body that produces that voice. As suggested by Connor, divine voices connote presence. The interaction with these vocalic bodies reshapes the speaker’s—in this case, Sor María’s and the celestial voices—own body and position inside and outside of the text: “[A]n imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual, visible body of the speaker” (Connor 2001, p. 36).<sup>11</sup> When the Virgin speaks to Sor María, the visionary author sees, hears, and speaks with the Holy Mother, and the reader sees and hears her as well, revealed, present, and occupying space alongside the visionary theologian who ventriloquizes her. The same can be said of the entire catalog of voices that Sor María mediates: we hear them through her text, and we see them alongside her. The power of this effect upon the reader and the currency of authority and influence it affords Sor María as the author of *Mística ciudad de Dios* cannot be dismissed.

The ventriloquial paradigm in *Mística ciudad de Dios* tenders Sor María with a unique set of positions, all of which she occupies simultaneously: vehicle for the divine voice, interlocutor, visionary author, theologian, renowned Abbess, exemplary mother to the nuns at Ágreda, and counselor to Phillip IV. Mary occupies a proportionate, although exalted, position anchored in her exceptionality that recalls a long-standing Scotist and Franciscan doctrinal tradition, which asserts the Virgin’s eternal, pure existence *ab initio* and her immaculate carnal conception in the womb of Saint Anne.<sup>12</sup> *Mística ciudad de Dios* showcases Mary’s singular exceptionality as the cornerstone of Sor María’s theological and hagiographical discourse around the doctrine of the immaculate conception. And yet, the text likewise stages a continual dialogue between the Virgin and the nun, two women chosen by God, share similarly remarkable positions of authority within their respective realms, and can speak with, for, and via each other. Nurtured by the intimacy made possible by the ventriloquial paradigm, their relationship is often familial, even equalizing, and scaffolded by the Virgin’s maternal guidance of Sor María as a daughter, “*Hija mía*”. Interestingly, Mary’s maternal intervention is stamped by an exegetical and theological corroboration of Sor María’s theological and biographical discourse. As noted earlier, almost every chapter of the six volumes of *Mística ciudad de Dios* includes a request to the Virgin from Sor María to answer questions or offer doctrinal clarifications on what the author has just presented, underlining the importance of the intellectual bond they share. For example, in Chapter 20 of Book I Part I, Sor María asks her divine mother

to clarify the status as *tota pulchra* throughout her earthly life, beyond the point of her immaculate conception. This point was one of the theological mysteries connected to the doctrine of immaculacy because the body of Christ needed to be born of a body that was never (before, during, or after His birth) in contact with sin, “*tota pulchra . . . et macula non est in te*” (Song of Songs 4:7) (Hernández 2019, pp. 24–27). But it also matters when we consider the relationship between Sor María and the Virgin, as the nun’s own purified nature has enabled hermeneutical acuity and function as a mediumistic vehicle for divine voices. In the form of a rhetorical question, Sor María posits, “Y si el Altísimo os eximió de la culpa, como podíades caer en otras, y ofender a quien os guardó de la primera?” / And if the Most High relieved you of guilt, how could you fall into other sins and offend him who kept you from the first? (Ágreda, Tomo II, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo XX, Sección 320, p. 141). Clearly, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception could not and would not have gone against God’s plan by sullying her purity; nonetheless, the question focuses on Mary’s active role in securing her sanctity. In her doctrinal (and very lengthy) response, the Virgin enthusiastically offers a schema for how to remain virtuous that is meant to guide Sor María’s (and, by extension, her convent community’s) visionary and religious life:

*Verdad es, que por lo beneficios, y gracias, que había obrado el Señor en mi alma, no era posible caer en pecado con ellas. Pero de tal fuerza dispuso su providencia este beneficio, que me ocultó la seguridad absoluta de no pecar: y conocía que por mi sola era posible caer, y solo (de)pendía de la Divina voluntad el no hacerlo; y así reservó para si el conocimiento; y mi seguridad, y a mí me dejó el cuidado, y santo temor de no pecar como viadora: y desde mi Concepción hasta la muerte no le perdí, mas antes creció en mi con la vida. (Ágreda, Tomo II, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo XX, Sección 322, p. 142)*

It is true that because of the benefits and graces the Lord had worked in my soul, it was impossible to fall into sin. But of such cogency did his providence dispose this benefit, that he hid from me the absolute assurance of not sinning: and he knew that by myself alone it was possible to fall, and it was only dependent on the Divine will to not to do so, and so he reserved for himself this knowledge; in my safe keeping, he left the care and holy fear of not sinning: and from my conception until my death I did not lose it (my purity), but instead it (virtue) grew in me throughout my life.

Bound simultaneously to transcendence and immanence, Mary cannot sin but also must not sin. As the eternal Mother of the Word, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception is exempted by divine will from original sin. However, she is humanly conceived to fulfill her role as mother of Christ, and it is in her material body wherein lies the specter of original sin and the potential for error embedded in free will. Sor María’s religious life and mystical trajectory participate in a parallel doubleness. As a visionary, she had firsthand experienced the transcendental divine and had secured a privileged position as a ventriloquial conduit for the sacred word. As a woman, she had to constantly be wary of an inherent capacity for sin and straying from God’s divine design. It is precisely at the intersection of divine grace and free will that the Virgin offers her *hija* the prescription for an exemplary and exceptional Christian life: “Y de aquí resultaban dos efectos necesarios en la vida Cristiana: el uno tener quietud en el alma; el otro no perder el temor, y desvelo de guardar mi tesoro” / And from this ensued two necessary effects in the Christian life: one, to have stillness in the soul; the other, not to lose fear and keep vigilance to keep my treasure. (Ágreda, Tomo II, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo XX, Sección 323, p. 143). Intimately linked through their ventriloquial relationship, Sor María’s life experience is mapped onto Mary’s vital practice. The Virgin instructs but also bears witness to her daughter’s “vida Cristiana” as she had her own, certifying the nun’s merit and the unquestionable purity of her faith. The eternally immaculate “Madre del Verbo Humanado”, Mary gains stature in the zealous protection of her virginity while here on earth. Sor María, chosen visionary and prophet, follows in her sacred mother’s path, full of divine prophecy and theological knowledge, and yet humble

and obedient, an irreproachable ventriloquial medium for the heavenly voices that make themselves present in *Mística ciudad de Dios*.

Further confirming the two women's attachment, when speaking to Sor María the Virgin's discourse often shifts from *hija* to *amiga*, a declaration of friendship that finds its bearings in their collective knowledge of divine mystery:

*Amiga mía, este es el mayor examen de las cosas del espíritu: que vengan con verdadera luz, y Sana Doctrina: que enseñen la mayor perfección de las virtudes, y con gran fuerza muevan para buscarla. . . . Y tu, alma ofrece humilde, y fervoroso agradecimiento al Señor; porque ha sido tan liberal contigo, . . . y te ha ilustrado con su Divina luz, y franqueado el archivo de sus secretos [ . . . ].* (Ágreda, Tomo II, Parte I, Libro I, Capítulo XX, Sección 324, p. 143)

My friend, this is the greatest examination of the things of the spirit: that they come with true light and Sound Doctrine: that they teach the greatest perfection of the virtues and with great force move us to seek it. [ . . . ] And you, my soul, offer humble and fervent thanksgiving to the Lord; because he has been so liberal with you, [ . . . ] has enlightened you with his Divine light and revealed to you the archive of his secrets [ . . . ].<sup>13</sup>

Revelation and prophecy offer a shared terrain upon which the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, alongside and through Sor María, can reveal the secrets of God's design in the plan of salvation. The sacred mystery of Mary's immaculacy is necessitated by the fundamental requirement that Christ be exempt from any contact—spiritual or physical—with the heritage of sin; Christ's, and, by extension, Mary's redemptive power resides precisely in their immunity, despite their material existence, from Adam's legacy. Consequently, the focus of these ventriloquial exchanges between the two *amigas*—following the conceptual schema of *Mística ciudad de Dios* as framed by medieval and early modern doctrinal interpretations of immaculacy—is on the exceptionality and authority of the Virgin, both of which seamlessly inform Sor María's own spiritual and intellectual singularity. The “archivo de secretos” that elucidates the condition of the Virgin as always already *tota pulchra* is jointly expounded upon by Sor María and the Virgin, whose voices woven together embody the position of expert theologians and chosen participants in God's divine design, one as immaculate redemptrix and the other as a visionary vessel of sacred truth.

Towards the end of the “Parte Primera” of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, the Virgin remarks on Sor María's singularity for, unlike so many men, the nun's devotion has led to an exalted state of purity:

*O hija mía carísima, pues tan dormidos están muchos de los hombres en atender a las obras paternas de mi Hijo, y Señor, de ti quiero en esto singular agradecimiento; pues con tan liberal mano te ha favorecido, señalándote los Ángeles, que te guarden. Atiende a su compañía y oye sus documentos con reverencia, déjate encaminar de su luz, respétalos como Embajadores del Altísimo, y pídeles su favor, para que purificada de tus culpas, y libre de imperfecciones, inflamada en el Divino amor te puedas reducir a un estado espiritualizado, que estés idónea para tratar con ellos y ser compañera suya, participando de sus Divinas ilustraciones, que no las negará el Altísimo, si te dispones de tu parte, como yo quiero.* (Ágreda, Tomo III, Parte I, Libro II, Capítulo XV, Sección 653, p. 11; emphasis mine)

O my dearest daughter, asleep are so many of the men in attending to the paternal works of my Son and Lord, that in you I want to make singular my gratitude; for with such a liberal hand, he has favored you, pointing you out to the Angels that they keep you. Attend to their company and listen to what they document with reverence, let yourself be directed by their light, respect them as Ambassadors of the Most High, and ask for their favor so that purified of your faults and free of imperfections, inflamed in Divine love, you can be reduced to a spiritualized state, so that you are suitable to deal with them and be their companion, participating

in His Divine illustrations, which the Most High will not deny, if you are well disposed, as I am.

In Book One of *Mística Ciudad de Dios*, Sor María meticulously described the Virgin's spiritual life in the heavens before her carnal conception, and her frequent and longed-for escapes to the company of angels after her earthly birth.<sup>14</sup> At this point in Book Two, the Virgin offers in return a place alongside her in the celestial sojourn. Chosen and loved by God, raised above all other creatures, “por cuyo medio disponía la Divina Sabiduría levantarme sobre todo lo criado”/Through which medium Divine Wisdom arranged me to rise above all that had been raised (Ágreda, Tomo III, Parte I, Libro II, Capítulo XV, Sección 654, p. 11), the Virgin and now Sor María long for the company of the angels with whom they together can share the work of the spirit and the fruits of their obedience:

*[U]nas veces obraba como espiritualizada, y sin embarazo de los sentidos, y me trataban los Ángeles como ellos mismos entre si; . . . otras era necesario padecer, y ser afligida en la parte interior del alma: otras en lo sensible, y en el cuerpo; otras padecía necesidades, soledad, y desamparos interiores, y según la vicisitud de estos efectos, y estados, recibía los favores, y visitas de los Santos Ángeles, que muchas veces hablaba con ellos por inteligencia; otras por visión imaginaria; otras por corporal, y sensible según el estado, y necesidad lo pedía, y como lo disponía el Altísimo. (Ágreda, Tomo III, Parte I, Libro II, Capítulo XV, Sección 654, p. 11)*

At times I acted as if full of the spirit, and without shame of my senses, and the Angels treated me as they treat each other; [. . .] at other times, it was necessary to suffer and to be afflicted in the innermost part of the soul: at others times, I suffered in the sensible, and in the body; at others, I suffered from inner needs, loneliness, and helplessness and, according to the effects of these vicissitudes and states, I received favors and visits from the Holy Angels with whom I often spoke in their intelligence; at other times by imaginary vision; at other times through the corporeal and the sensible according to the state and necessity he demanded and as the Most High ordered.

The ventriloquized voice of the Virgin, which renders her intimate experiences, doctrinal teachings, and spiritual truths, ultimately expresses a confluence of voices with her *hija* and *amiga* that are simultaneously double and indistinguishable, her own and Sor María's. The Virgin's singular journey between the spiritual world and this world—transcendence and immanence—is replicated in the nun's own journey, the two voices and experiences melded in *Mística ciudad de Dios* into one.

At this point in the analysis, we can examine how Sor María's ventriloquial act affords her a position of authority. Indeed, the formal structure of ventriloquism may readily lend itself to problematic gendered scenarios of control and power. Whether we point to the Delphic Oracle or a modern-day Las Vegas act, ventriloquism necessitates two entities: the subject with a voice and the dummy or “ventriloquial media”, which emits the voice (Hayes 2011, p. 5).<sup>15</sup> As Helen Davies (2012) has remarked, “there are both aesthetic and ethical implications” that we are forced to consider, mainly when the “dummy” position is occupied by a woman who is being penetrated and used as a receptacle for a male voice (p. 6). In this context, the ventriloquial structure can reinforce a “gender power imbalance” in service of a patriarchal communicative framework that fosters male voices and women's silences and privileges original over copy (Davies 2012, p. 8). And yet, the ventriloquial mechanism may also allow for alternative power dynamics. Examining instances of “Socratic ventriloquism”, David Goldblatt (2005) has, for example, explored the ventriloquial structure and its affiliation to the divine from an alternative perspective:

It remains controversial as to what, generally, the *daemon* is in Greek thinking as it is to what extent and how it acts upon Socrates. Nevertheless, whatever else can be said about the Socrates/*daemon* connection, we can speak somewhat confidently about its structure. The *daemon* seems to place Socrates in the position of intermediary [. . .] the *daemon* influencing what Socrates is about to say. Dae-

*monic* communication is always a matter of vocality, the divine sign is always a voice (phone). Socrates hears the *daemon*, which he has heard since his childhood, and without questioning it, speaks accordingly. Socrates does the vocal bidding prompted by the *daemon* if and when the *daemon* is forbidding or directing him not to say certain things. We are led to believe in the *Apology*, for example, that the *daemon* intervenes only when Socratic talk or action takes a wrong turn and therefore needs appropriate admonishment. Nevertheless, in order to know when to intervene, the *daimon must always be present to Socrates' speech as Socrates is present to the speech of his interlocutors, as the ventriloquist must be present to the dummy*. (p. 99, emphasis mine)<sup>16</sup>

Following Goldblatt, Francois Cooren (2010) has similarly argued for a more ambiguous relationship between the ventriloquist and the dummy or 'figure,' one in which there is fluidity in the adjudication of power, subjectivity, and agency between the one who speaks and the one who is spoken: "to the extent that a certain vacillation or undecidability is identified between the ventriloquist and the dummy [...] we also dwell on the figure as it retroactively talks back to the vent, making the vent react to what it just said, even if what was just said was the product of the vent's artful performance" (pp. 88–89). Thus understood, the ventriloquial speech act may result in a communicative web in which subject positions are manifested and agency secured through a non-hierarchized dialogue of voices, not in the control of one entity over another, i.e., speaker over dummy. A complimentary ontological effect of the participatory dialogic relationship of these voices/subjects/agents is how power derives from association.<sup>17</sup> Cooren (2010) explains:

As [Bruno] Latour (1986) noted more than 20 years ago, power is a matter of association, which is another way of saying that becoming or looking more powerful or authoritative consists of associating oneself with other agents, actors, or figures who or that are supposed to support one's positions, creating a configuration that appears to be in favor of what is put forward. Implicitly invoking the figures of reliability and competency thus allows the [speaker] to claim that she is authorized or allowed to ask to for promotion. Being authorized indeed means that it is not only she—whoever "she" is—who is staged as establishing a case for promotion, but also the figures she invokes or ventriloquizes . . . As we now know, human beings themselves are collectives [. . .]. (pp. 141–42).

The idea of human beings as "collectives" is fundamental to theorizing ventriloquism because it emphasizes, once again, not a tiered or parasitic relationship but power emanating from a common associative ground. Consequently, the potential for the correlative presence of the ventriloquist and the divine voices that speak, are spoken to, and are spoken through yields a more nuanced understanding of the mediumistic visionary act in *Mística ciudad de Dios*. God the Father, Christ, the Angels, and Mary are continuously in attendance listening, speaking, and, when elicited, answering to Sor María as their interlocutor. Because Sor María both authors and reproduces their voices, the ventriloquial dialogue is integral to constructing and communicating the nun's theological and spiritual revelations. Ultimately, the voices' divine truth and Sor María's theological discourse are inextricably intertwined and co-present (conceptually and physically in the text's imaginary). Therefore, despite the professed imbalance of power between the position of God, the Virgin Mary, and a cloistered early modern nun—Sor María often makes use of the *humilitas* topos to express dutiful subservience to the divine order—I propose we consider how *Mística ciudad de Dios* enacts a much less straightforward and deferential power relationship. In the case of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, God, Mary, and the Angels are heard because Sor María reproduces their voices, securing her own authority by having been divinely chosen, given *ciencia infusa*, to speak and theologize. The mediumistic potency of Sor María's divine ventriloquism thus becomes evident. Cited in first person, "which is to say speaking with the voice of another or the voice of another speaking through oneself" (Connor 2001, p. 45), the sacred voices transcribed in *Mística ciudad de Dios* proffer for themselves, their 'author' and

their ‘figure’ an incontestable shared significance secured by Sor María’s status as a chosen vehicle for the divine Word. As noted by Beatriz Ferrús Antón (2008), “al convertirse en amanuense de Dios y sus misterios, Sor María de Jesús acaba por elaborar una ‘memoria del saber de Dios’, convierte la Teología en el objetivo último de su trabajo”/by becoming the amanuensis of God and his mysteries, Sor María constructs a ‘memory of the knowledge of God,’ converting Theology into the objective of her work (p. 41). Sor María deploys this sacred clout anchored in their (God’s, the Virgin’s, and her) collective project—to profess the doctrinal truth of Mary’s immaculate conception—to present and develop her authorial positionality and theological discourse, concurrently enunciated by her and by the voices that speak through her.

As I hope to have demonstrated, the personal, authorial, and political self-validation made possible by the ventriloquial schema in *Mística ciudad de Dios* is fundamental to the analysis of this text. From my perspective, we must recognize the formal implications, discursive power, and ideological effects of the presence of the divine voice in *Mística ciudad de Dios*. In her visionary reproduction and dialogic appropriation of the Word, Sor María ensures the transmittal of her singular voice and secures a textual and conceptual space for her theological discourse. Sor María speaks the voice of the divine and, in so doing, unequivocally asserts herself as a chosen sanctified vehicle, structurally and narratively linked to the Virgin and Christ in their roles as ventriloquists of the Word of God and as sacred co-Redemptors of our stained humanity. Regarded by Philip IV and her conventual community as a visionary and saintly woman, Sor María’s ventriloquial speech act aims to offer an irrefutable textual and hermeneutical map for the interdependence of the sacred and the human in the path to eternal salvation as well as her own privilege and authority. No less, *Mística ciudad de Dios* amply demonstrates how religious women thinkers and writers of the early modern period could assert their selfhoods by appropriating, against all expectations, the voice of the sacred other.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The most recent and complete biography of Sor María’s is Marilyn H. Fedewa’s *María of Agreda: Mystical Lady in Blue* (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> *Mística ciudad de Dios* saw at least two versions composed between 1637 and 1660 and was posthumously published in 1670 in Antwerp by book merchants Cornelio and the Widow of Verdussen.
- <sup>3</sup> This is a comparison also made by Colahan, pages 12–13. In *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Boydell & Brewer, 2004), Liz Herbert McAvoy (2004) examines Margery Kempe’s works arguing, “that the textual effect of this prioritising of the insistent and apparently unmediated female voice is carefully constructed in order to imbue it with an authority which will ratify the woman’s ability to ventriloquise the voice of God” (Herbert McAvoy p. 172). The critic takes a similar approach in her examination of Julian of Norwich as a conduit, “both word and Word of God,” “merging of [...] the voice of God, Julian’s voice and the variety of other voices [...] to form an articulation of the prophetic insight” (Herbert McAvoy p. 231). For additional analysis of the incorporation and use of God’s voice in medieval women mystics, see, for example, Rosalyn Voaden’s *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of the Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York Medieval Press, 1999).
- <sup>4</sup> Álvarez Santaló (2005) further states: “Trata de textos impresos, de “revelaciones”, en las que el discurso de Dios, la Virgen o los ángeles con la persona visionaria se ha propuesto a los lectores como literal” (p. 170).
- <sup>5</sup> In addition to Sor María, Álvarez Santaló (2005) also examines Sor María de la Antigua’s *Desengaño de religiosos y de almas que tratan de virtud* (Ed. Fr. Pedro de Valbuena, Sevilla, Juan de Cabezas, 1678).

- 6 As stated by Aquinas, “For sometimes one is called a prophet because he possesses all four [modes of prophecy], namely, that he sees imaginary visions and has an understanding of them and he boldly announces to others and he works miracles” (1 Cor. 14: 1–4, p. 813).
- 7 For a discussion on the issues of authorship in Juana de la Cruz’s Works, see Boon (2016) “Introduction”, pp. 14–19.
- 8 Juana de la Cruz’s *El Libro del Conorte* saw its first modern edition in García de Andrés’s *El Conhorte: sermones de una mujer. La Santa (1481–1534)* (Madrid, Fundación Universitaria Española, 1999). The text circulated in manuscript form across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Additionally, proponents of Juana de la Cruz’s canonization published several biographies throughout the seventeenth century, including Antonio Daza’s 1610 *Historia, vida y milagros, éxtasis y revelaciones de la bienaventurada Virgen santa Juana de la Cruz, de la Tercera orden de nuestro Seráfico Padre san Francisco* and Pedro Navarro’s 1622 *Favores de el Rey del Cielo hechos a su esposa la Santa Juana de la Cruz, Religiosa de la Orden Tercera de Penitencia de N. P. S. Francisco*. Following an examination of her incorrupt body, Juana de la Cruz’s apostolic process commenced in Rome in 1621. Given this broader reception context, Sor María may have well been acquainted with Juana de la Cruz’s sermons. On this topic see Isabelle Poutrin 1995, *Le Voile et la Plume: Autobiographe et Sainteté dans L’Espagne Moderne* (Casa de Velázquez), especially page 80.
- 9 In her article, “At the Limits of (Trans)Gender: Jesus, Mary, and the Angels in the Visionary Sermons of Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534)”, Boon (2018) offers a comprehensive analysis of just such theological implications—with a focus on issues of gender and intersex fluidity (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. 48.2: 261–300). For book-length studies on Juana de la Cruz, see Ronald E. Surtz’s (1990) *The Guitar of God: Gender, Power, and Authority in the Visionary World of Mother Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) and María Luengo Balbás’s (2015) *Juana de la Cruz: vida y obra de una visionaria del siglo XVI* (Tesis Doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Departamento de Filología Española II). Juana de la Cruz’s works in the original have most recently been compiled in the *Obra Completa* (2003) (Edited by Luce López Baralt and Eulogio Pancho. Madrid: Alianza Editorial). Boon and Ronald Surtz’s (2016) edited collection of a selection of the sermons translated by Ronald E. Surtz and Nora Weinerth includes the above-cited “Introduction” composed by Boon (2016).
- 10 Jodi Bilinkoff (1997) documents the similar example of María de Santo Domingo (1485–1524), the *Beata de Piedrahita*, whose own visionary and prophetic revelations found an audience and support in Cardinal Cisneros and King Ferdinand of Aragon (Establishing Authority: A Peasant Visionary and Her Audience in Early Sixteenth-Century Spain. *Studia Mystica*, 18: 36–59).
- 11 Regarding this same aspect, Colahan (1994) has remarked, “the Virgin takes on a greater appearance of reality and her personality becomes more vivid and engaging by virtue of conversing with Sor María” (p. 133).
- 12 Marian exceptionality was fundamental to the theological discourses that defended the elevation of the doctrine of immaculacy to dogma during the medieval and early modern periods. On this issue, see Sarah Jane Boss’s (2007), *The Development of the Doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception (Mary: The Complete Resource*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially pp. 207–35). For an analysis of the immaculacy debates in the Spanish cultural, political, and artistic landscape, see my *Immaculate Conceptions: The Power of the Religious Imagination in Early Modern Spain* (Hernández 2019).
- 13 On the topic of friendship, see also my essay “Friends in High Places. The Correspondence of Felipe IV and Sor María de Ágreda” (2015), where I analyze how Sor María employs the concept of friendship in the context of her relationship with Philip IV (*Perspectives on Early Modern Women in Iberia and the Americas: Studies in Law, Society, Art, and Literature in Honor of Anne J. Cruz*. Edited by María Cristina Quintero and Adrienne Martín. Madrid: Arte Poética: pp. 422–42).
- 14 For a detailed examination of Sor María’s treatment of Mary’s life during her fetal stage and infancy, see my *Immaculate Conceptions* (Hernández 2019), pp. 190–96.
- 15 Regarding the Delphic Oracle, Connor (2001) asserts: “[T]he Delphic oracle became the prime exhibit in a Western tradition which associated prophecy and profane arts of divination with ventriloquism, which is to say speaking with the voice of another, or the voice of another speaking through oneself” (p. 49).
- 16 See Goldblatt (2005) pages 89–106 for additional analysis of “Socratic ventriloquism”.
- 17 See Cooren’s (2010) Chapter 4, especially page 88, for a discussion on how critics have theorized ventriloquism vis à vis Bakhtin’s dialogic theory.

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