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Nora Weinerth

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de la Cruz, Juana.

***Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481–1534: Visionary Sermons.* Ed. Jessica A. Boon and Ronald E. Surtz. Intro. and notes Jessica A. Boon. Trans. Ronald E. Surtz and Nora Weinerth.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 47 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 494. Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016. Pp. xiii, 242. ISBN 978-0-86698-549-9 (paperback) US\$39.95.

Mother Juana de la Cruz was a famous Castilian visionary whose life coincided with an extraordinary period in that country's religious history. During the latter part of the fifteenth and early years of the sixteenth centuries, the Iberian peninsula was wide open to seers, prophets, mystics, and messianic figures who freely displayed their "wares" to a receptive public which ran the social gamut from commoners to monarchs and archbishops. The Inquisition rarely intervened; at this point in time, the tribunals' primary mission was to combat the perceived threat to society posed by insincere Jewish converts to Christianity.

A seer (*vidente* in Spanish) is something awesome to behold—just thirty years ago on the outskirts of Madrid, in a cow pasture near the royal monastery of El Escorial, Luz Amparo Cuevas, an uneducated, middle-aged housekeeper from a village in La Mancha, became the medium through which the Virgin of Sorrows delivered her messages on a regular basis for over twenty years to thousands of believers and skeptics, including this reviewer. Cuevas would enter a trance-like state; her voice lowered to an unearthly tone, out would flow the Virgin's messages for over an hour. In like fashion, some five hundred years earlier, and only fifty miles south of El Escorial, Juana de la Cruz, another peasant woman from another village in La Mancha, experienced similar visionary raptures. Every Sunday for twenty years, lying prone on the floor of her convent's chapel for hours at a time, Juana, a Franciscan tertiary, became the medium through which Jesus Christ delivered his messages. These utterances were written down by her followers and organized as sermons known as the *El libro del conorte* (Book of Consolation) meant to accompany the liturgical year. Ultimately more than one thousand pages were compiled by Juana's followers, along with a life, to which she apparently contributed.

Sociological comparisons aside, the goal of the present volume in *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* is to deliver to the modern-day reader six of Juana's seventy-two extraordinary sermons and awaken interest in the large corpus of her work, which currently is available only in Spanish and, apart from the sermons, remains in manuscript. The specialists who prepared the volume—Jessica A. Boon, Ronald E. Surtz, and Nora Weinerth—are eminently well-qualified. Surtz, a professor of Spanish literature at Princeton, published a study of Juana's sermons in 1991. Boon, who has a degree in theology, has written about sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism, while Weinerth publishes on late-medieval and sixteenth-century Spanish literature. Boon and Surtz wrote the introductory material, and Weinerth prepared the preliminary translations, which Surtz then fine-tuned and Boon annotated. The editors have kept the introduction and scholarly discussion short, just sufficient to provide basic background information. The brevity of the introduction invites the reader to explore and enjoy Juana's voice independently. The footnotes are helpful in identifying the scriptural or theological sources for Juana's ideas, but refrain from drawing too many connections. An unusual bonus is a lively postscript by the translator, Weinerth, in which she shares her own experience of "conversion" to Mother Juana's special voice. Finally, a bibliography directs the reader to relevant primary and secondary sources.

The six sermons chosen for the volume complete a cycle on the life of Christ: his incarnation, birth, childhood, crucifixion, resurrection, and the exaltation of the Holy Cross. While these are not some of Juana's wilder, more original sermons, the selection provides coherence and allows a modern reader to enter into the spiritual world of a religious woman who lived one generation before Teresa of Avila. Although Juana, who led her convent for over twenty years, may or may not have been literate, she was thoroughly steeped in the *devotio moderna*, which privileged meditation on Christ's passion and Mary's suffering. She possessed a fine imagination and flair for characterization and story-telling. How she acquired her devotional knowledge and verbal ability are topics left to the reader to explore.

Specialists will readily appreciate Juana's unique perspective and see the points at which she reflects or departs from her contemporaries' presentation of these subjects. The volumes in *The Other Voice* are designed for classroom use, and this one is no exception. *Visionary Sermons* would do very well in an upper-level or graduate course dedicated to religious women or aspects of

religious faith in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For undergraduates in a course about Early Modern Spain or Europe, a sermon or two would work well to illustrate the religious fervour of the time. This would take some preparation on the instructor's part: for those who have had no prior exposure to Christian devotional literature, the sermons are a very intense, alien experience, particularly the sermon on Christ's passion, and would certainly provoke a lively classroom discussion.

Altogether, the resulting book is a very readable but authoritative excursion into the massive body of work produced by Mother Juana, and the editors are to be congratulated on their successful collaborative effort to bring her voice into the English-speaking world.

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Corrigenda: In the third paragraph, the introduction is incorrectly attributed to both editors. The introductory material was written solely by Jessica A. Boon.

In the same paragraph, Jessica A. Boon's degree is incorrect. Her correct degree is a PhD in Religious Studies.