

Short Essay:

Gender Transient, Juana de la Cruz

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Gender as a construct is a truth of humanity that has long been refuted and argued against, despite its observable reflection throughout history. Spencer-Hall and Gutt's point that scholarship "is not just about flipping binaries but also about reading, discovering, different kinds of gender," is inherently true and provable by investigating many different sources (2021:27). The case of Juana de la Cruz is a poignant example of someone who believed in much the same, especially regarding Christ being "read as genderqueer, trans, or beyond gender," making it her life's work to preach and spread her own theories on the topic (2021:27).

Spencer-Hall and Gutt discuss the modern reality of the Vatican denouncing queer philosophy despite religion powerfully affirming gender diversity, as gender non-conformity was more frequently understood as a "proximity to, rather than distance from, the divine" (2021:17). They further acknowledge the limited perspective of 'pre-trans studies' of the Middle Ages, which pertained only to male and female polarities rather than what many saints strived for: "transcending the gender binary entirely, inhabiting a 'third' gender" (2021:25). An idea of both genders is as important, if not overshadowed by a concept of neither. Sexon portrays a deeper inspection of Christ's non-binary body as a reference point for a follower's own identification, as identifying with Christ's body would be the same as taking on that non-binary identity personally (2021:134.). Juana da la Cruz (1481–1534), to impressive audiences of emperors, bishops, and military leaders, was a preacher of that very topic.

As cited by Boon, *Vida y Fin* tells of Juana de la Cruz being changed from male to female in the womb in respect to Mary, by God's grace (2018:265). Juana understood sexuality as being fluid just as gender is fluid—herself being a product of such. In her lifetime, Juana de la Cruz took charge of herself "not as a weak woman, but as a strong and forcible man" (Elphick 2021:96). She initiated her independent life within a persona that felt strong to her and used that

masculine energy to pursue the faith that guided her forth. “[W]here having made her prayer in the habit of a man [...] she went and adored the holy image of the Mother of God,” then “put on the woman’s apparel which she brought with her. Lifting up her eyes to an image of our Blessed Lady [...], [she] gave thanks to her anew” (2021:96). And with both these incarnations of self, she addressed her divinity because both were her true face, and both should show their respects. To paraphrase her Creation sermon: man and woman can be called female, and conversely both can be called male, as due by the living and everlasting spirit (Elphick 2021:90).

Juana’s sermon on St Francis depicted the agreement between God and Francis joining together as husband and wife (Boon 2018:283). Juana believed Francis could be God’s wife just as she and anyone could be fluid in identity. By her sermon, Jesus himself argued for the sake of being both male and female, taking the sexes’ equality as a precedent to that of circumcision, and as Boon argues “Jesus wants equality for women, which he proved by being born male but of a woman only, thus privileging each gender in a separate way,” building an interpretation of Jesus as a woman in a man’s body for the sake of humanity (2018:279). Juana is most succinct in her Sermon 1, where she says “For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ. [...] [T]here is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Elphick 2021:88–89). Juana goes one step further than defining him as neither man nor woman to clarify that Christ is ‘a new human’, for he is both male and female (2021:89).

Juana’s teachings were dedicated to this distinction, as she truly preached on the idea of a faith where gender exists on a level separate from any bodily feature; God and Christ were beyond the restriction of such concepts. As reflected on by Boon, as much as Juana seemed to identify with a sense of non-binary gender, it was rather she identified with the divine, which itself was non-binary, thus she was as well by an implicit extension (2018:272). Ultimately,

Spencer-Hall and Gutt's discussion on the instability of gender within differing conceptualizations, and in the contexts of Juana de la Cruz, extends that gender is as malleable as the mind is at conceptualizing it in the first place (2021:30).

Bibliography

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