

FLYING, FIGHTING, AND FORGIVING: THE MATERIALITY OF THE LIVING CROSS IN THE VISIONARY SERMONS OF JUANA DE LA CRUZ*

Jessica A. Boon

University North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

jboon@email.unc.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5794-856X>

Juana Vásquez Gutiérrez (1481-1534) took the name Juana de la Cruz in 1497 when she joined the *beaterio*, Santo María de la Cruz in Cubas, outside of Madrid¹. This religious house was named in honor of a miracle experienced by Inés Martínez, the young girl whose Marian apparitions in 1449 led to the founding of the *beaterio* (Christian 1981: 264-265). Inés' hand was frozen into the sign of the cross as an external manifestation of the veracity of the apparitions, a miracle that Juana rehearses at the beginning of her semi-autobiography *Vida y fin* (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: f. 1v)². Throughout her life at the *beaterio*-turned-Clarisan-convent, Juana was known for her frequent visions of Mary (Boon 2010: 127-148), for the weekly *sermones* during which Jesus reportedly spoke through her enraptured body to extend the biblical narratives and describe the festivities of daily life in heaven³, and

* This work is framed in the research project «Catalogue of Living Saints (1400-1550): Towards a complete corpus of a female hagiographic model» (PID2019-104237GB-I00/AEI/10.13039/501100011033). I presented an early version at the international workshop *Hacia un nuevo modelo hagiográfico femenino en la Castilla bajomedieval*, organized by Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida and Pablo Acosta-García, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, January 10-11, 2022. My thanks to Sarah J. Bloesch for reading an early draft.

¹ The *beaterio* was incorporated into the Franciscan tertiary order in 1508. Acosta-García (2021: 8) discusses the «ambivalent» status of the tertiaries.

² This text is conserved in El Escorial, K-III-13, ff. 1r-137r. I follow the editors' decisions for all transcriptions. Acosta-García (2021: 6) discusses Juana «re-founding» the convent and replacing Inés after Inés fell into sinful ways.

³ Juana preached (or Jesus preached through her) for thirteen years to an audience of nuns from her convent, but her fame spread and her performances were attended even by Cardinal Cisneros and

for a stigmatic experience (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 38r-39r)⁴. However, Juana and her community also understood her to be a «living saint» (Zarri 1996) with a unique association with the feast day of the finding of the cross, since she was born, took the habit, and died on that date, May 3rd, according to the convent book *Libro de la Casa* (Juana de la Cruz 2018/2021: 38v)⁵.

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of Passion spirituality for Juana's embodied devotion, including her stigmata, her belief that her illnesses allowed her to take on the suffering of souls in purgatory, and the penances she chose to endure that would make her Christomimetic (Surtz 1990: 37-62; Acosta-García 2021: 13-14). Here I trace a different thread: Juana's focus on the Passion led her not only to physical suffering but also to contemplate the materiality of the cross in particular and the *arma Christi* (weapons of Christ, including the cross, nails, crown of thorns, floggers, column; see Figure 1 for a sample) more broadly. As art historian Cynthia Hahn notes, the *arma Christi* held multiple layers of signification, for devotees understood them as at once the instruments used to torture Christ, the weapons he himself wielded in defense of humanity against the devil, and, ultimately, as «trophies of [Christ's] victory» (2020: 55-63). The editors of a recent volume on the *arma Christi* suggest that the *arma Christi* were predominantly understood as the victorious weapons of Christ in the early Middle Ages, but that by the late Middle Ages they were primarily understood as instruments of his torture (Cooper/Denny-Brown 2014: 5). For Juana, of all the *arma Christi*, it was the cross as material object whose sanctity imbued it with

inquisitors, according to the *Vida y fin* (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 27v). 72 of her visionary sermons from a thirteen year period were transcribed in the manuscript *El libro del Conorte* (first half of the sixteenth century, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, J-II-18. Modern edition: Juana de la Cruz 1999, hereafter *El Conhorte*, cited as volume, sermon: section: page; I follow the editors' decisions for all transcriptions except where noted. A second copy is in Rome, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Congregazione Riti, MS 3074). Translations are mine, except for sermons 19 and 22 which have been published in translation (Juana de la Cruz 2016). I give an overview of the many hands involved in the production of the manuscript, including scribes who were nuns in the convent and male Franciscan editors (Boon 2016: 15-18). Muñoz Fernández discusses Juana's sermons as both ratifying and challenging Cardinal Cisneros' reform program (2016: 198-99, 202-8).

⁴Several scholars have discussed other visionary Castilian women who received the stigmata and the influence of the accounts of Catherine of Sienna's stigmatization on their narrations (Acosta-García 2020: 143-172; Sanmartín Bastida 2021: 611-612).

⁵«Día de la Cruz de mayo nació nuestra madre santa Juana de la Cruz y tomó el hábito y murió». This text is conserved in Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 9661. I follow the editors' decisions for all transcriptions. In Galicia, the feast day of finding of the cross was celebrated May 3 starting in the seventh century; once merged with the Roman rite the main celebration became September 14. For discussion of this feast in early modern Spain, we find the comment «On May 3, throughout Christendom the Cross was adorned with flowers, kissed, and serenaded with hymns praising its sweet and soft arms, its luminosity and precious fruit» (Giles 2009: 21).

power. In this article I explore how the physicality of the cross as splintery wood influenced Juana's images of the cross as at once instrument of torture leading to death yet also as triumphant, animate, and even violent in heaven and at the Last Judgment.



Figure 1. Maestro de Paredes de Nava (possibly Juan de Nalda, disciple of Pedro de Berruguete), *Retablo de la Misa de San Gregorio* (detail), early sixteenth century. Museo de Santa Cruz, Toledo. (Photo: by the author)

Juana's understanding of the cross in her sermons as able to mutate, feed others, enact the liturgy, and fight the angels in a flying battle takes to its

logical extreme what Hahn describes as fundamental to medieval Christian devotion to the cross: «any cross—an object that can be symbol, relic, and reliquary—in itself creates a powerful and divine space through its inherent theatricality, physicality, and aura» (Hahn 2020: 11)⁶. I propose that it is crucial to Juana’s conceptualization of the cross’ theatricality and physicality that wood is not an inert or dead substance, but rather living. Caroline Walker Bynum has examined «living images», especially crucifixes, across late medieval Europe (2011: 105-121); Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida has illuminated the importance of «living art» in Castilian «plastic visions» *i.e.*, visions by Juana and others of «particularly dynamic» statues and other religious images that shaped daily devotion in her convent and across the European religious landscape (2021: 604-606)⁷. My work extends these insights by focusing on the «living cross» in the celestial daily life envisioned by Juana de la Cruz⁸.

Animating the Cross: Medieval Christian Materiality

In order to understand how Juana’s audience might have been receptive to sermons in which the cross flies, fights, and speaks, it is necessary to begin with medieval Christian devotional interest in trees and wood more generally, and devotion to the cross as both an instrument of and actant in the Passion more specifically. Recently, historians of Christianity have argued that materiality was the core preoccupation of medieval devotion. Bynum explores how medieval authors understood *materia*, the Latin term for matter, to be the fundamental substratum linking all that exists. In the Middle Ages, «stuff»⁹ made out of matter was categorized as «body», a particularly expansive and animated category: «[Medieval Christians] understood “body” to mean “changeable thing:” gem, tree, log, or cadaver, as well as living human being» (Bynum 2011: 32). Isidore of Seville’s encyclopedia, for example,

⁶ Giles discusses the theatricality of Juana’s sermons (1999: 273-297); Sanmartín Bastida addresses Juana’s gendered performance of the category of «living saint» (2016: 183-208).

⁷ See also Sanmartín Bastida’s analysis of the importance of images for inspiring Juana’s trances and her interpretation of her visions of statues as giving her authority in her convent (2019: 55-73). The most important of Juana’s visions of objects as living is her vision in *Vida y fin* of a crucifix where all the characters are moving as though alive (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 65v, see Sanmartín Bastida 2021: 608-609).

⁸ This project thus also engages Caroline Walker Bynum’s call for analyzing late medieval visionary experience as primarily material rather than simply embodied, since bodies in visions are always mediated through their clothing and the objects around them (2011: 101-104). I suggest that Juana materializes bodies in a different way by creating a persona for the principal *arma*, the cross.

⁹ One of the foremost scholars of contemporary material culture makes this point: «My starting point is that we too are stuff, and our use and identification with material culture provides a capacity for enhancing, just as much as for submerging, our humanity» (Miller 2010: 6).

specifically identified wood as matter that can change (Ritchey 2014: 21); in Bynum's discussion, a tree may become a log but this does not shift its essence as wood—as body it has merely transformed. In addition, Bynum underscores that «the stuff of which matter is made is part of their impact. This understanding... involves a sense that matter is *per se* living» (Bynum 2011: 121). Matter as alive opens the door for the possibility of objects being animate, and indeed serves to explain the popularity of animate sculpture and miraculous objects in the later Middle Ages, when statues of Mary wept and hosts bled. Hahn's discussion of the cross in medieval devotion illustrates Bynum's point: of all the *arma Christi*, the cross at times «is cast as active and itself body-like: it has arms and legs and a measure comparable to the body and it is frequently referred to as living» (Hahn 2020: 52). As we will see, Juana's cross is living, animate, fierce, and even vocal, but not anthropomorphized into a human with arms and legs.

Building on Bynum's emphasis on Christian materiality but with particular emphasis on nature and flora, literature scholar Sara Ritchey proposes an expansive view of what she and Bynum call «holy matter». In her view, the principal devotion of the late Middle Ages was the profound sense that God had «re-created» the world as holy by becoming human through Mary and by being crucified (Ritchey 2014: 8-12). Thus to experience God did not require an out of body episode or an internal identification of the soul with God, but rather the world itself was sanctified and could save. Although the theology of re-creation is most obviously supported by Eucharistic theology, in which God «reentered the world» regularly in the materiality of the bread and wine (Ritchey 2014: 13), medieval Christians particularly engaged with an arboreal idea of re-creation. The Tree of Life was the source of the Fall, while a tree would later as the cross enable the salvific death that completed the re-creation of the world (Ritchey 2014: 19-20)¹⁰. Indeed, some medieval authors referred to Christ being crucified «on the tree of the cross» (according to some, the Tree of Life specifically), emphasizing the cross as still living even while functioning as an *arma Christi* (Ritchey 2014: 93).

Juana draws on the living nature of wood to develop several important themes about the cross, both in her semi-autobiography *Vida y fin* and across numerous sermons in her compilation *El Conhorte*. Like Bynum, Juana insists on the materiality of the cross as malleable wood, most spectacularly

¹⁰ As Ritchey notes here, various early theologians connected the two trees, but there was also a powerful early narrative passed on orally rather than biblically that Adam's son Seth had returned to Eden and received from an angel several seeds of the original piece of fruit that Adam and Eve bit. According to this scenario, one of the seeds sprouted the tree that would eventually become the cross.

in her vision of the cross «mutating moment to moment» through different colors and shapes (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 72r)¹¹. She also regularly depicts the wood of the cross resurrecting to its initial form as a living, fruitful tree. For Juana, then, the cross displays all the capacities *as wood* that Jesus' *body* does in heaven, including an ability to provide miraculous platters of food for the blessed at celestial feasts (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 69v, 65r). In addition, like Ritchey and in tandem with other Castilian writers from several religious traditions (Robinson 2006), Juana drew on the tradition of re-creation to re-imagine Jesus' self-identification as a vine in the Gospel of John (15: 5)¹². In one sermon, Jesus identifies the world as a vine that he consistently cares for and even bears some similarity to, claiming himself to be green wood but deeming sinners to be dry wood, thus equating wood and flesh (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 18: 6: 648).

According to Ritchey, Passion-centered devotions were an offshoot of the medieval Christian focus on the world as holy; the popularity of Passion devotion throughout medieval Europe from the eleventh century on and in Castile in the Isabelline era onwards was therefore part of the bigger picture in which God continually engaged the world through matter¹³. In this view, the crucifix is not just a tortured body nailed on inanimate wood, but rather both substances are sanctified living matter. As Ritchey points out, this parallel between the cross and the living body was central to texts such as the Old English *The Dream of the Rood*, which portrays the cross as injured by the nails in parallel to Jesus (Ritchey 2014: 20)¹⁴. Hahn in turn focuses on the malleability of the Rood cross, noting that the rood seems to shimmer in between a covering of gold and a covering of blood (Hahn 2020: 26)¹⁵.

Later poetic works in both Latin and the vernacular would go even farther and anthropomorphize the cross, imagining it as a character engaging in

¹¹ «Cada semana me parece se muta de momento a momento de diversidad de colores. E por todo el día entero parece que tiembla el árbol, y en cada temblor se mudan las flores de diversidad de colores e olores, e las frutas de muchas maneras e sabores, deleytosas, dulçes, muy más sublimadas que otros días». The cross continues mutating for the next folio. Note that in a sermon Juana discusses the mutability of most living matter: in heaven all living things once in heaven such birds and trees return to their original state, *i.e.* leaves become trees «como de primero estaban». Only God and human souls and angels are permanent (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 60: 8: 1272).

¹² «I am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing» (Douay Rheims translation).

¹³ Passion spirituality was quite belated in Castile in comparison to the rest of Europe (Whinnom 1963; Cátedra 2001: 202-207; Boon 2012: 38-52; Robinson 2013: 317-372).

¹⁴ Another scholar puts it succinctly: «At its core, the power of the medieval cross lay in its intimate connection to Christ's incarnate body» (Juster 2017: 260).

¹⁵ Hahn (2020:52) later discusses Voragine's description of the cross in the *Legenda aurea* as transformed from «sterile... "malodorous" material» into «fertile, light-giving, even sublime substance».

dialogue with Mary at Calvary. In these poems, known collectively as «the debate between Mary and the cross», the cross functions either as the abject object of Mary's wrath over her son's impending death, or inversely, the cross itself discourses at length about Christology and proves to be the source for Mary's theological foreknowledge (Sticca 1988: 72-77). This figure of a speaking cross was certainly available on the peninsula in Juana's era, as Ubertino da Casale's meditation on the poem «Crux dura quid fecisti» in the midst of his life of Christ, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, had been printed in Latin but also translated at Isabel's behest into Castilian (though never printed)¹⁶. The cross does not, however, appear as a speaking, animate character in any of the Castilian narrative lives of Christ composed as poems starting in the 1480s and as prose works published starting in 1493, nor in visionary records or translations of medieval European Passion classics circulating at the same time in Castile¹⁷. There is in fact only one brief reference to Casale's depiction of the cross during Juana's era: the anonymous author of the Passion meditation treatise, *Fasciculus myrrhe* (1511), portrays Mary as irritable with the cross for refusing to bend down to her level (98v-99r), implying that she expected it to have motility¹⁸. In Juana's visionary sermons, in contrast, the cross speaks on several registers, both to defend its role in Jesus' death

¹⁶ There is an introduction to and an edition of the original Latin poem (Greer Fein 1998: 87-160); available at <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/moralint.htm>> [accessed: 21/12/2022]. Queen Isabel commissioned a translation of the 1485 Latin edition (Venice: A. de Bonettis) from Alonso Ortiz, completed after her death in 1507 but never published (Modern edition is Casale 2007, with information on Isabel's request for translation on p. 23; the poem *Crux dura quid fecisti* is translated in book 4, ch. 25, 1098-1100). Some scholarship positions Casale in his Christology and his impact on Castilian mystics (Martínez Ruíz 2000, Pérez Simon 2009), but does not address his use of the poem or his representation of an animate cross.

¹⁷ My manuscript-in-progress, *Spanish Passion: Jesus, Mary, and the Jews in the Early Imperial Imagination*, examines the five bestselling printed Passion and Vita Christi treatises by Castilian authors from 1492-1526: Jiménez de Prejano's *Lucero de la vida cristiana* (published 1493, cited from 1495), Andrés de Li's *Thesoro de la pasión* (1494, cited from modern edition 2011), Juan de Padilla's *Retablo de la vida de Cristo* (1505), the anonymous Franciscan *Fasciculus myrrhe* (1511, revised 1524), and Tenerio and Escobar's *Passio duorum* (1526). While Castilians translated Passion authors from other languages who featured the cross in their works, such as Domenico Calvaca's *Specchio di Croce*, at no point is it a speaking or animate cross (Cavalca 1486; for a recent comprehensive overview of his work, see Troiano 2024). The Valencian visionary Isabel de Villena wrote extensively about several of the *arma Christi*, especially the crown of thorns, in her *Vita Christi*. She represents Adam, Eve, and Mary all embracing and speaking to the cross, but it does not speak back to them or move (Isabel de Villena 1992, 202: 650-652; 203: 653-654; 224: 691; for scholarship on Villena and the *arma Christi*, see Cortijo Ocaña 2016; for scholarship on Villena's approach to materiality more generally, see Twomey 2013).

¹⁸ The first edition (1511) is available in the British Library, BL C.63.c.4; in it the author cites Casale over fifteen times. More easily accessible is the fifth edition (1524), available as BNM R-10946. Few scholars have discussed the *Fasciculus myrrhe* (Gómez Redondo 2012: vol. 1, 995-999; Codet 2014: 472-499; Boon 2012: 44-45; Boon 2016: 123-126).

and to read the lectionary reading for the day. This second instance connects the cross as sanctifying matter to a priestly role of sanctifying through liturgy, as we will see below.

The medieval debate poem genre confirms that devotees could envision the cross as an animate, speaking object, but it is worth noting that there are also potential sources in the Middle Ages for the cross as actively violent or actively flying through the air, the specific types of animation featured in Juana's most unusual scenarios about the cross. Art historian Achim Timmermann has identified a visual allegory of the Living Cross, which he describes as more accurately the «Avenging Crucifix», principally conserved in Eastern Europe with a few Northern European examples. The images show the cross as having four hands (one at the end of each arm both horizontally and vertically), two of which bless the Church and the saved while the other two wield a sword and other weapons in order to destroy the devil and the allegorical figure of the Synagogue (Timmermann 2001: 141).

More than simply repealing the Old Law by its very existence, the crucifix literally takes matters into its own hands, striving to vanquish and exterminate its foes. In most examples of the Living Cross, Synagogue dies a particularly painful death... transfixed by a sword that punctures her skull and sometimes also her chest and hands (147-148).

Although there are no extant late medieval Castilian versions of this image¹⁹, the concept of the cross as active avenger against the Jews might well have held some appeal in Spain in particular²⁰. Since there was considerable traffic in Flemish art objects throughout the Isabelline era into the sixteenth century (Weiss 2022), reports of this type of altarpiece might have trickled back to Juana.

The idea that a cross might fly, however, may have been much more reasonable in the late medieval imaginary than a cross that wields weapons,

¹⁹This type of image is currently familiar in Spain, as an anonymous German rendition from 1410 arrived in Spain in 1929 through the Thyssen Bornemisza Museum, found at <<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/anonymous-german-artist-active-westphalia/diptych-symbols-virgin-and-redeeming-0>> [accessed: 21/12/2022].

²⁰Note that Timmerman connects the allegorical paintings to the prevalence of ritual murder accusations and concerns over (Hussite) heresy, both dominant in Eastern Europe in the fifteenth century (2001, 149-154). The first ritual murder accusation in Castile occurred in the 1490s (Weissberger 2009: 7-30). Heresy of course was a principal concern throughout medieval Spanish history from the Arian Visigoths through the late medieval era of forced conversions from Judaism and Islam.

especially among Franciscans²¹. Bonaventure in his *Legenda Maior* describes Francis' famous vision at La Verna of a seraph descending towards him. Once the seraph came near to Francis,

there appeared between the wings the figure of a man crucified, with his hands and his feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were lifted above his head, two were extended for flight and two covered his whole body (Bonaventure 1978: 305).

Artistic renderings of this event, most famously Giotto's, suggested that rays of light emanated from the crucifix at the hands and feet to impress the stigmata into Francis. Later stigmatics such as Catherine of Siena reported visually similar experiences; according to her biographer Raymond of Capua, Catherine stated «I saw the Lord fixed to the cross above me descending in a great light» (Muessig 2020: 144). Some versions of Capua's hagiography of Catherine describe rays of pure light from his scars piercing her body, while others, including the first Castilian translation in 1511, identify how the process produced invisible stigmata by means of «rays of blood» «in the shape of pure light and similar to rays of sun» (Acosta-García 2020b: 11).

Most importantly in this visual and textual tradition of stigmatic miracles, however, is the consistent representation of the seraph-turned-crucifix. As we see in Figure 2 by Juana's contemporary, Juan de Flandes, he provides a standard representation of the scene at la Verna: a bright red crucifix with wings hangs in the sky glowing as it works its miracle producing Saint Francis' stigmata. Juana in several of her sermons mentions a cross with wings, specifically angel wings but with a human form: for example, «his Cross [had] a form like a man and wings like an angel» (1999: II, 37: 7: 996)²². As Sanmartín Bastida has pointed out, Castilian «visions were strikingly related to the visual monastic art that surrounded them» (2021: 605). Several scholars have also emphasized the importance of Francis throughout *Conorte* and *Vida y fin* respectively (Surtz 1990: 37-62; Acosta-García 2021: 18); if Juana's devotional life centered Francis both as a saint participating in festivities in heaven and as the original stigmatic, then it seems likely that she would be quite familiar with the narrative of Francis' vision at La Verna.

²¹ Juana was among them, according to her *Vida y fin*. On one Good Friday, she found herself in pain after such a trance, and the nuns who came into her cell saw healed stigmata on her feet. Juana then explained that Jesus had pressed his hands and feet to her and eventually his entire body to hers, leaving her with visible wounds that some months later she prayed would disappear (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 38v-39r).

²² «[S]u Cruz teniendo bullo como de un hombre y alas como de ángel».



Figure 2. Juan de Flandes, *Triptico de San Miguel Arcángel*, 1505-1506. Diocesan Museum of Salamanca. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

If angels can become winged crucifixes in the Franciscan imagination, then it may have seemed a logical possibility to both Juana and her audience that the cross as living matter could fly, especially a cross described as having a human form and angel wings. In Juana's development of this theme, she proposes that the cross takes flight to demonstrate to both the angels and the blessed its obedience, its power, and its purpose, yet it remained wood rather than being an animated crucifix. It is thus to the nature of the cross as wood that we must turn first in order to piece together how a cross might fly and fight, a nature that Jesus, as putative voice for the *sermones* issuing from Juana's enraptured body, highlights for an audience of nuns, ecclesiastics, and even military and royalty²³.

²³ Her semi-autobiography describes her raptures and audience (Juana de la Cruz 2019/2022: 27r-v).

The Materiality of the Living Cross as Splintery, Dry Wood

Juana emphasizes that the materiality of the cross was central to Jesus' torment by her focus on the cross as cross, that is, as the crossed planks of wood to which Jesus was nailed, in the Good Friday sermon (#19) and the sermon on the «santa cruz de las batallas» (#37).²⁴ In sermon 19, she specifies that the makers of the cross had intentionally not smoothed the wood down once they had roughly shaped it into the form of a cross, instead leaving it full of «snags and splinters» that injured Jesus' flesh (1999: I, 19: 14: 670; 2016: 136)²⁵. In sermon 37, Jesus himself vocalizes this point, commenting that the wood of the cross during his crucifixion had felt «dry» (*seco*), «rough» (*crudo*), and «splintery» (*astillada*) (II, 37: 8: 997). What is particularly interesting in the initial discussion in the Good Friday sermon, however, is that these wooden hooks then cause actual injury to Mary when she embraces the cross under his feet and kisses the splinters (I, 19: 16: 671). While Juana immediately indicates that this is how Mary was crucified in her soul while Jesus was crucified in his body, if Mary pressed her lips to splintery wood, then she too was injured and bleeding in parallel to Jesus²⁶.

Juana's attention to the shards that make wood a particularly effective weapon against flesh leads her later in the Good Friday sermon to a consideration of the mutability of dry wood. Wood is easily broken once dried, yet if the wooden cross had shattered it would have been useless as a torture implement. Juana embeds this reflection about the qualities of dry wood as the material substratum of the crucifixion in an original scenario she includes right after Jesus' words on the cross announcing «I thirst» and «it is finished» (I, 19: 21: 675). In Juana's dramatic rendition, the angels, overhearing Jesus' pronouncements, race down from heaven to gather his blood in chalices, a frequent image in art from the era (see Figure 3)²⁷. However, going far

²⁴ Other authors from the era discussed the wood of the cross as matter, speculating for example on the type(s) of wood it was constructed from (Prejano 1495: 61: 63r). None besides Juana represent it as splintery, as far as I am aware.

²⁵ «[C]omo la cruz la habían hecho a sabiendas muy cruel y mal acepillada, llena de ganchos y astillas, y su sacratísimo cuerpo estaba todo llagado y roto de los azotes y heridas...». Note that the makers of the cross are presumably Jews not Romans; Juana mostly uses terms like «evil ones» to reference the torturers, but when she does identify a culprit it is always the collective Jewish men. In the next paragraph, for example, she begins pleading with her «hermanos y amigos» to stop tormenting her son, implying those present were Jewish.

²⁶ Juana also describes how Mary's lips are flayed by the roughness of the cross («se llegaba a la cruz y se abrazaba con ella con grandes ansias, besándola... hasta que tenía los labios desollados de la aspereza de ella», 1999, I, 19: 15: 670, translated in Juana de la Cruz 2016: 137).

²⁷ Bynum discusses the pan-European trope of angels holding chalices to catch Jesus' blood (Bynum 2007: 6, 153).

beyond this common visual, in Juana's sermon the angels attempt to remove Jesus from the cross to save him from death, causing him such great pain that he orders them to stop²⁸. Frustrated, the angels then turn to wage (verbal) war against the cross («tomaban batalla contra la cruz»), during which they question why it participated in the Passion, focusing their ire on the specific materiality of the wood. The verbal battle includes a vituperative apostrophe as the angels storm at the cross, asking why it did not break and destroy itself rather than be the instrument of God's death:

Oh cruel cross! Oh dry stick without pity! Oh bitter wood without any virtue! Why are you hurting him so much?... Why do you not split apart and break to pieces and let him go? We will catch him and lift him up so he does not fall to the ground... Oh tree [so] ungrateful to the Lord of heaven and earth! We saw many trees break tonight and refuse to allow Judas to hang himself on them because he had walked in Christ's company and he had embraced him and given him the kiss of peace²⁹. And you, cross, dry and cruel wood, you suffer your Creator upon you and you bear him most cruelly, tormenting and punishing him! (Juana de la Cruz 2016: 143).

¡Oh cruz cruel! ¡Oh palo seco y sin piedad! ¡Oh madero amargo y sin ninguna virtud! ¿Por qué le tienes lastimándole tanto?... ¿Por qué no te rajas y haces pedazos y le dejas de ti, que nosotros le tomaremos y recogeremos, que no caiga en tierra, y le subiremos luego al cielo... ¡Oh árbol desagradecido para el Señor del cielo y tierra! ¡Que aún nosotros vimos esta noche quebrarse muchos árboles, por no querer sufrir a Judas que se ahorcase de ellos, porque había andado en su compañía y porque le había abrazado y dado paz, y tú, cruz y madero seco y cruel, sufres a tu criador en ti y le tienes con muy grande crueldad, atormentándole y dándole pena! (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 19: 23: 676-677)

The «dry and cruel» wood from the «disgraced tree» is, in the angels' view, the direct agent of Jesus' suffering; its cruelty seems directly related to the lack of moisture or greenness in the wood, since without pliability it would cause more damage.

²⁸ Jesus pleads with them several times to stop hurting him and let him die. For example: «Dejadme ángeles, dejadme, que me matéis; dejadme acabar de expirar, no lleguéis a mí que mayor pena me dais» (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 19: 23: 676; 2016: 142).

²⁹ The sermon later provides another paragraph on Judas' death (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 19: 25: 677-678; 2016: 144). The episode of Judas' death was popular across different genres throughout medieval Europe, including the *Celestina* (Beltrán Llavador 2020).



Figure 3. Nicolás Delli, *Juicio Final*, c. 1445. Catedral Vieja de Salamanca. (Photo: by the author).
*The angels hold the cross, the column with a flog around it,
 the hammer and nails, and a chalice for catching Jesus' blood.*

Above all, the angels do not consider the cross a weapon wielded by others, that is, passive, but rather berate the wood for actively having chosen to torment Jesus (an action for which it was all the more culpable because other trees in the same day had broken themselves into bits to refuse the traitor Judas an easy death by hanging). In the next section of the sermon, the angels are informed that they have acted wrongly in reproofing the cross: in fact, the voice of God brusquely tells them to «shut up» (*callad*, Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 19: 23: 677). God then explains that the cross had been obedient and ought to be revered, ultimately warning the angels that if the cross had refused its destiny as an instrument of his Passion, God would have demanded that Mary be Jesus' cross and the angels his crucifiers (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 19: 23: 677)³⁰.

³⁰ «[A] su madre misma mandara que fiera la cruz y vosotros, los ángeles, fuerais los crucificadores». The first Passion treatise written in Castilian, Andrés de Li's *Thesoro de la passion* (1494), ends the narrative of Jesus' death with a long prayer of praise to the cross for its role in the salvation of humanity, a paraphrase of a prayer originally composed by Ludolph of Saxony in his well-known *Vita Christi*. Accompanied by an image of the bare cross and nails, Li's prayer specifically indicates that the angels and all the inhabitants of heaven regularly praise the cross rather than denigrate it (Li 2011: 340-341). The prayer is a paraphrase of two paragraphs of a six-paragraph prayer that Ludolph himself attributes to

Anger with the cross is not only a misdirected concern of the angels, however. Juana rehearses this imaginative scenario a second time in sermon 37, with intriguing differences that increase the focus on the living cross as active (though unwilling) participant in the crucifixion. Here, the scenario is not at Calvary, with the angels and God intervening. Instead, Jesus «re-creates» the original sequence as a celestial episode that begins with Jesus demanding that the blessed in heaven adore the cross. The cross flies through heaven as the winged cross with a human figure, the combination known from St. Francis' vision at La Verna. Once again, like the angels during Jesus' crucifixion in sermon 19, Juana describes how the blessed in heaven refuse to adore this soaring crucifix, and again enter into (verbal) battle (*batalla*) with it. The blessed rebuke the cross:

Oh dry wood, cruel and without virtue!... Why do you consent to have the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ spilled on you? Oh forgetful tree! Why did you not hide yourself in the depths of the earth, so that they could not find you in order to hang him on you?

¡Oh madero seco y sin virtud y cruel!... ¿ Por qué consentiste ser derramada la sangre de nuestro Señor Jesucristo en ti, con tanta crueldad? ¡Oh árbol olvidadizo! ¿Porqué no te escondiste en el fond[o]³¹ de la tierra, que no te hallasen para le poner en ti? (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 8: 997).

In this case the dry wood is cruel because as a «forgetful tree» it did not pay enough attention and therefore did not have time to hide or submerge itself in order to avoid being made into Jesus' cross.

In this second iteration of anger with the dry wood of the cross, the cross, flying freely because it was not weighed down by Jesus as it had been during the nearly-parallel Good Friday sermon, responds to the rebukes of the blessed rather than depending on God to intervene. Speaking through its nail holes («respondió por los agujeros de los clavos») in its own defense, the cross asserts that it initially had been a regular tree, with its roots well-embedded in the ground, clothed in bark, and «adorned» with branches and leaves, but then to form the cross it was cut down and stripped of its beauty, a kind of «martyrdom» or suffering (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 8: 997)³². The trans-

Rabanas Maurus (780-856), who was known for his acrostic and geometric poems to the cross (Ludolph of Saxony 2010: II, 67: 5: 604).

³¹ The editor transcribed *fondón*, but the translators corrected it to *fondo* on the basis of the original.

³² «¡Oh amigos, no me culpéis, que yo tenía mis raíces debajo de la tierra, y estaba vestido de mis corizas y adornado de mis ramas y hojas, y me cortaron y despojaron de todo ello. Y aún pasé yo martirios...

formed tree claims in fact that at the time of the crucifixion it had tried to hide underwater, but when it emerged it was forced into the shape of a cross. In this second version of the cross as central character in the Passion, Juana's audience would not have interpreted the dry wood of the cross as an obedient agent of God, but rather would have understood its matter to be living, even humanized, with nail holes as its mouth allowing it to speak its sense of shame and loss over its forced transformation into an *arma Christi*.

Despite this brief attribution of passivity to the cross, the scene in sermon 37 continues with nearly the same details as the angelic attendance at the crucifixion had offered on Good Friday. The blessed find the cross' self-defense insufficient and issue the exact same accusation that the angels had tendered—that the tree could have broken itself like the trees that refused to aid Judas in suicide. Jesus then provides the exact same rebuke as had God the Father—if the cross had not participated, then Jesus would have resorted to the backup plan of having the angels crucify him on the body of Mary (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 8: 997-998). There is a different ending to the second version of the tale, however, as the blessed do agree to adore the cross and once they begin, it suddenly recuperates all its bark and branches and flowers, a kind of resurrection that Juana also described in her *Vida y fin*, as discussed above (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 8: 998; 2019/2022: 72r). Having transformed from dry splintery wood back into a living tree giving forth fruit and flowers, the cross then provides the blessed with fruits and liquor (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 9: 999). The capacities of the living cross in this final episode are reminiscent of the sequence Juana usually attributed to Jesus, in which he regularly provided platters of food and excellent liquor from his wounds to the blessed on feast days (e.g. Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 4: 38: 343).

These two versions of the animated cross which examine its role as material *arma* provide Juana's audience with the sense that, although the cross was actively obedient to God in this life in contributing splintery injury to Jesus' flesh as well as supporting his body throughout the crucifixion, it continues to be an agent in heaven, able to defend itself and resurrect into a living tree in heaven in a near-exact parallel to Jesus' trajectory. In both sermons, the mutability of trees from plant to dry wood provides the central mechanism for this reconsideration of the veneration of the cross as part of the *arma Christi*, the weapons used against Jesus but also what he himself wielded against the devil. The cross is living matter, and it is an instrument of redemption precisely

Y tornábame a esconder, y otra vez salí sobre las aguas, y prendiéronme e hiciéronme como ahora estoy».

because its revivifying capacity to shift from as green wood to dry cruel wood and back again make it an effective, animate participant in salvation.

The Cross in Heavenly Battles

And indeed, it is the living cross as participant in salvation that seems to be the ultimate focus of Sermon 37³³. After the splintery cross turned back into a green tree provides sustenance to the blessed, Juana briefly considers God's judgment, both of individuals as they die and at the Last Judgment, a theme she returns to in other sermons in relation to the materiality of wood, as we will see. In the final folios of sermon 37, first Jesus identifies the cross to be his throne, explaining that the other *arma Christi* are the decorations and pillows on the throne's dais (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 37: 9: 999). He then abruptly straps the cross-throne on like a sword and begins to mete out justice to good and evil souls, the sword as proof of his might. Yet Jesus finds he must remove the sword in order to invite the saved closer to him because otherwise they are frightened of the *arma*. Throughout the unusual scenario, the cross does not just hang from his belt but participates vocally in the condemnation of the damned³⁴. Jesus comments on this fact: it should come as no surprise that the cross is vocal, because the cross and indeed all the *arma* will participate in the judgment of all souls at the end times³⁵. These few paragraphs at the end of a sermon repeat a scenario intended to prove that the living cross was worthy of devotion despite being a weapon used at Jesus' death; they encapsulate much about the cross as triumphant actant in heaven rather than obedient weapon on earth, and it is to this version of the cross, capable of violence and eventually acting in judgment, that we must turn.

So far, the concept of *batalla* has been principally attributed to the angels and blessed as a term for their verbal attacks on the animate cross. In sermons devoted to the true cross (e.g. 22, 51), however, Juana proposes the cross as capable of winning its own actual battles, though celestial rather than worldly. Juana examines this possibility both in relation to the angelic refutation of the cross and also in relation to the cross' participation in the Last Judgment,

³³ Some sermons in the collection have abrupt shifts between celestial scenarios, indicating that the compilers may have put together related scenes preached on different days. If this is the case here, the ultimate focus of the sermon was produced by the compilers rather than Juana.

³⁴ This version of the cross as sword is quite different than the sword dance analyzed by Sanmartín Bastida and Massip Bonet (2017: 15-38).

³⁵ This point returns in other Spanish mystical texts that focus on the Passion, such as Osuna's *Primer abecedario espiritual* (2004: letter E, 2: 228).

but markedly the dramatic effects of the scenarios are enacted by the living wood of the cross.

In sermon 22 on the finding of the true cross, rather than reviewing the miraculous finding of the Holy Cross by the mother of Emperor Constantine, Juana instead reflects extensively on the power of the cross as weapon, dramatizing the living matter of the cross in its capacity as a weapon with agency³⁶. Jesus describes how on that feast day he directed the angels to go search for all the crosses of the world, not just the crucifixes found on altars in churches, but wherever crosses occur: in flowers, in trees, where rivers meet. The angels retrieve all the natural and manmade crosses they can find and return with them to heaven, yet none match an enormous cross already present in heaven that only Jesus could lift. Jesus then asks each angel to carry in a festival procession one of the signs of the cross they had found (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 22: 17: 758; 2016: 196). The seraphim, however, once again refuse to carry crosses or sing the praises of the wood that was an instrument of Jesus' torture (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 22: 26: 765; 2016: 203-204).

In a response that clearly evokes the «debates between Mary and the cross» poems that assume the cross's animacy, in this case transferred to a theatrical rather than poetic format, the massive celestial cross that only Jesus could wield speaks out, vocally offended by the angels' refusal to honor it: it challenges the seraphim to a fight (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 22: 27: 766; 2016: 204-205)³⁷. It is notable that Bynum, in discussing the animation of devotional objects in the Middle Ages, suggests that they have the «agency to heal, to pacify conflict, to increase fertility, even to wage war» (2015: 78). In Juana's reflection on the violent capacities of living wood, the cross in heaven flies in pursuit after the seraphim, emitting a dense fog that darkens the field of battle, shooting bolts of lightning from its nail holes, and threatening loudly that since it had been able to torture even God, it was surely capable of giving mere angels a good thrashing (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 22: 27: 766-768; 2016: 204-206). Here, the cross' capacity as weapon is magnified long after the events of Calvary were over, for it functions as a powerful weapon against legions of angels even in the present day. After this violent scene in which the cross thoroughly trounces the angelic rank, Jesus intervenes and

³⁶ For discussion of Juana's atypical avoidance of the legend concerning the discovery of the True Cross, see my mini-introduction to the English translation of the sermon (Juana de la Cruz 2016: 183, translation 183-214).

³⁷ «Venid todos, venid todos, a adorarme y humillaros debajo de mí. Y si no queréis de grado, que tuve poderío para sojuzgar al poderoso Dios y tenerle clavado y atado y muerto y llagado y apasionado en mí, tengo eterno poder de sojuzgar y atormentar a vosotros y ponerlos debajo de mí». Note that several paragraphs earlier Jesus explicitly gave the cross permission and power over the angels.

asks that the cross spare them, and it agrees, suddenly golden, glowing, and calmly merciful (Juana de la Cruz 1999: I, 22: 27: 768)³⁸. While dramatically increasing its efficacy as weapon, Juana also attributes to the cross the divine capacity to pardon evildoers. In this case, the materiality of the wooden cross closely resembles the body of Jesus, a material corporeality paired with supernatural capacities; this pairing effectively justifies its participation in the final judgement.

A few paragraphs later, the cross appears animated in a different register. Jesus asks the cross to participate in the liturgical service for the feast day, and the cross gives the readings of the days by speaking through its nail holes, then immediately the nails repeat the same readings aloud (Juana de la Cruz 1999: 22: 33-36: 773-774). Wood that can fly, fight, forgive, and perform the liturgy is ultimately animate in its woodenness even when not personified. The *materia* of Jesus, the *materia* of the cross, and the *materia* of the liturgy are all in parallel throughout this sermon, a theology of re-creation that makes every thing or bit of «stuff» potentially Christ-like.

Juana returns to the image of the cross as active combatant in sermon 51 on the exaltation of the cross, but in this case connected to the Last Judgment rather than the liturgy. The sermon in fact begins with a long *figura* of the Last Judgment which features the cross as a principal actant (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II, 51: 1: 1159). Her initial description is of the cross in the valley of Josaphat with Jesus on a throne above it, an image found in a Toledan altarpiece (if she had access to the chapter house of the main cathedral, see Figure 4). In the sermon, Jesus requires all souls present at the Last Judgment to adore the cross, but the sinners turn their backs. The cross immediately turns into a column of fire (see Figure 4 for the glow around the cross) and sends out splinters of fire that function like rays against those who have disrespected it («astillas de fuego como rayas», Juana de la Cruz 1999: II: 51: 2: 1159, evoking some descriptions of Catherine of Siena's stigmata mentioned above). Thus the dry wooden materiality that had made the cross so treacherous to the flesh of Jesus and Mary forms it into an effective weapon against the damned.

Yet the cross does not only function as a weapon in this scenario, but also as a path towards salvation. After shooting fiery shards, the cross as column of fire turns into a source of light and consolation for the saved (1160). It then reverts to its form as a tree, covered in branches and flowers, to function as a stairway for the saved to reach heaven (Juana de la Cruz 1999: II: 51: 3:

³⁸ «Y que, oída la Santa Cruz la su voz [de Jesús], se tornó con grande sosiego y serenidad, echando de sí muy gran claridad y resplandor y olores y suavidades...».

1160). As splintery wood, the cross can damn others, not just injure Jesus and Mary; as tree, it helps the saved climb towards God. In its very materiality, the cross takes on the functions of he who was crucified on it, participating actively as an instrument of Jesus' decisions at the Last Judgment.



Figure 4. Juan de Borgoña and workshop, *Juicio final*, 1509-1511. Catedral de Toledo, Sala Capitular. (Photo: Cabildo Primado Catedral de Toledo, taken by the author)

Conclusion

Historian of Christianity Barbara Newman has proposed the term «imaginative theology» as a category of medieval theological method that was nourished principally by visions and images.³⁹ In relation to an enraptured Juana who channeled Jesus' expositions centered on the festive daily life of heaven and on detailed expansions of biblical stories and church doctrines beyond the original texts, the term «imaginative theology» takes on a double valence: performed by a nun, it is authorized by God. I suggest that hers was a materialized imaginative theology, rooted in medieval ideas about *materia* in general and wood as living matter in particular. The mark of truth for the founding of Cubas was Inés' hand paralyzed into the form of the cross; one of the marks of Juana's imaginative theology was the inverse, in which weaponized wood is rendered as living to participate in salvation. The *persona* of a splintery, flying, embattled tree animates both life in heaven and Juana's remarkable sermons.

³⁹ «[Imaginative theology] “thinks with” images, rather than propositions or scriptural texts or rarefied inner experience—though none of these need be excluded» (Newman 2005: 298, discussed in Ritchey 2014: 8). Newman goes on to suggest that the apparent distinction between «epiphanic visions» (an unexpected mystical experience) and «heuristic visions» (a rhetorical device such as a waking dream) has been overemphasized (2005: 300) and that there is instead a «thin and porous... boundary» between the two (301).

Bibliographic References

- ACOSTA-GARCÍA, Pablo (2020a), «“En viva sangre bañadas”: Caterina da Siena y las *vitae* de María de Ajofrín, Juana de la Cruz, María de Santo Domingo y otras santas vivas castellanas», *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della pietà*, 33, pp. 143-172. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4580499>.
- ACOSTA-GARCÍA, Pablo (2020b), «On Manuscripts, Prints and Blessed Transformations: Caterina da Siena’s *Legenda maior* as a Model of Sainthood in Premodern Castile», *Religions*, 11:33, pp. 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010033>.
- ACOSTA-GARCÍA, Pablo (2021), «Radical Succession: Hagiography, Reform, and Franciscan Identity in the Convent of the Abbess Juana de la Cruz», *Religions*, 12:223, pp. 1-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030223>.
- BELTRÁN LLAVIDOR, Rafael (2020), «Del suicidio de Judas al salto de Pármeno: Codicia, traición y caídas mortales en *La Celestina*», *Celestinesca*, 44, pp. 9-80. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7203/Celestinesca.44.19428>.
- BOON, Jessica A. (2010), «Mother Juana de la Cruz: Marian Visions and Female Preaching», in Hilaire Kallendorf (coord.), *A New Companion to Hispanic Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 127-148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004183506.i-518.33>.
- BOON, Jessica A. (2012), *The Mystical Science of the Soul: Medieval Cognition in Bernardino de Laredo’s Recollection Mysticism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- BOON, Jessica A. (2016), «Introduction», in Jessica A. Boon and Ronald E. Surtz (coords.), *Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481–1534: Visionary Sermons*. Toronto, Tempe: Iter Academic Press, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 1-33.
- BOON, Jessica A. (2016), «Violence and the “Virtual Jew” in Castilian Passion Narratives, 1490s-1510s», *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 8:1, pp. 110-129. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2015.1077987>.
- BONAVENTURE (1978), «The Life of St. Francis», in Ewert Cousins (trans.), *The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, pp. 177-328.
- BYNUM, Caroline Walker (2007), *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- BYNUM, Caroline Walker (2011), *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: Zone Books.

- BYNUM, Caroline Walker (2015), «The Animation and Agency of Holy Food: Bread and Wine as Material Divine in the European Middle Ages», in Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik (coords.), *The Materiality of Divine Agency*. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 70-86. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501502262-007>.
- CASALE, Ubertino de (2007), *Árbol de la vida crucificada*, Luis Pérez Simón (coord.). Murcia: Editorial Espigas.
- CÁTEDRA, Pedro M. (2001), *Poesía de pasión en la Edad Media: El Cancionero de Pero Gómez de Ferrol*. Salamanca: Seminario de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas.
- CAVALCA, Domenico (1486), *Espejo de la cruz*, Alfonso Fernández de Palencia (trans.). NP: Antón Martínez.
- CHRISTIAN, William A., Jr. (1981), *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- CODET, Cécile (2014), *Femmes et éducation en Espagne à l'aube des temps modernes (1454-fin des années 1520)* [PhD dissertation]. École Normal Supérieure de Lyon.
- COOPER, Lisa H., and DENNY-BROWN, Andrea (2014), «Introduction: *Arma Christi*: The Material Culture of the Passion», in Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (coords.), *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 1-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315241296>.
- CORTIJO OCAÑA, Antonio (2016), «Sor Isabel de Villena: De la *religio amoris* al *amor religionis*», *Mirabilia*, 22:1, pp. 1-29. Online: <<https://raco.cat/index.php/Mirabilia/article/view/310249>> [consulted: 7/07/2024].
- Fasciculus mirrhe* (1511), Burgos: Fadrigue de Basilea.
- Fasciculus myrrhe: El qual trata de la passion de nuestro redemptor Jesu Christo* (1524). Sevilla: Juan Varela de Salamanca.
- GILES, Mary E. (1999), «Spanish Visionary Women and the Paradox of Performance», in Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (coords.), *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 273-297.
- GILES, Ryan D. (2009), *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- GÓMEZ REDONDO, Fernando (2012), *Historia de la prosa de los Reyes Católicos: El umbral del Renacimiento*, 2 vols. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra.
- GREER FEIN, Susanna (1998), «The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross: Introduction», in Susanna Greer Fein (coord.), *Moral Love Songs and Laments*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, pp. 87-95.

- HAHN, Cynthia (2020), *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- ISABEL DE VILLENA (1992), *Vita Christi*, Josep Almiñana Vallés (coord.), 2 vols. Valencia: Ajuntament de València.
- JUANA DE LA CRUZ (1999), *El Conhorte: Sermones de una mujer. La Santa Juana (1481-1534)*, Inocente García de Andrés (coord.), 2 vols. Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española.
- JUANA DE LA CRUZ (2016), *Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481-1534: Visionary Sermons*, Jessica A. Boon and Ronald E. Surtz (coords.), Ronald E. Surtz and Nora Weinerth (trans.). Toronto/Tempe, AZ: Iter Academic Press.
- JUANA DE LA CRUZ 2018/2021, *Libro de la Casa y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Cruz*, María Victoria Curto (coord.). Online: <http://catalogodesantasvivas.visionarias.es/index.php/Juana_de_la_Cruz#Vida_manuscrita_.282.29> [consulted: 21/12/2022].
- JUANA DE LA CRUZ (2019/2022), *La vida y fin de la bienaventurada virgen sancta Juana de la Cruz*, María Luengo Balbás and Fructuoso Atencia Requena (coords.). Online: <http://catalogodesantasvivas.visionarias.es/index.php/Juana_de_la_Cruz#Vida_Manuscrita_.281.29> [consulted: 21/12/2022].
- JUSTER, Susan (2017), «Planting the “Great Cross”: The Life, and Death, of Crosses in English America», *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 74:2, pp. 241-270. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.74.2.0241>.
- LI, Andrés de (2011), *A Scholarly Edition of Andrés de Li's Thesoro de la pasion (1494)*, Laura Delbrugge (coord.). Leiden: Brill.
- LUDOLPH OF SAXONY (2010), *La vida de Cristo*, Emilio del Río (ed.). Madrid: Comillas, 2 vols.
- MARTÍNEZ RUÍZ, Carlos Mateo (2000), *De la dramatización de los acontecimientos de la Pascua a la cristología: El cuarto libro del Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu de Ubertino de Casale*. Roma: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum.
- MILLER, Daniel (2010), *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- MUESSIG, Carolyn (2020), *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MUÑOZ FERNÁNDEZ, Angela (2016), «Iberian Women in Religion and Policies of Disciplined Dissent in the Archbishopric of Toledo in the Fifteenth to Early Sixteenth Centuries: The Heaven of Juana de la Cruz», in Fabrizio Titone (coord.), *Disciplined Dissent: Strategies of Non-Confrontational Protest in Europe from the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century*. Roma: Viella, pp. 193-218.

- NEWMAN, Barbara (2005), *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- OSUNA, Francisco de (2004), *Primer abecedario espiritual*, José Juan Morcillo Pérez (ed.). Madrid: Editorial Cisneros.
- PADILLA, Juan de (1505), *Retablo de la vida de Cristo*. Seville: Jacobo Cromberger.
- PÉREZ SIMÓN, Luis (2009), «Presencia de Ubertino de Casale (1259-1329): En el *Primer abecedario espiritual*, de Francisco de Osuna (1492-1541/2)», *Verdad y vida*, 67:254, pp. 275-308.
- PREJANO, Pedro Jiménez de (1495), *Lucero de la vida cristiana*. Burgos: Fadrique de Basilea.
- RITCHEY, Sara (2014), *Holy Matter: Changing Perceptions of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- ROBINSON, Cynthia (2006), «Trees of Love, Trees of Knowledge: Towards a Definition of a Cross-Confessional Current in Late Medieval Iberian Spirituality», *Medieval Encounters*, 12:3, pp. 388-435. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006706779166101>.
- ROBINSON, Cynthia (2013), *Imagining the Passion in a Multiconfessional Castile: The Virgin, Christ, Devotions, and Images in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press.
- SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca (2016), «Sobre las categorías de santa, beata y visionaria: El género performativo», *Cahiers d'études hispaniques médiévales*, 1:39, pp. 183-208. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3917/cehm.039.0183>.
- SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca (2019), «Un episodio en la vida de Juana de la Cruz: Sobre la autoridad espiritual femenina a comienzos del siglo XVI», *Edad de Oro*, 38, pp. 55-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15366/edadoro2019.38.003>.
- SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca (2021), «Performing Authority Through Iconography: On Iberian Visionary Women and Images», in E. Michael Gerli and Ryan D. Giles (coords.), *The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Medieval Iberia: Unity in Diversity*. New York: Routledge, pp. 600-620. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210483>.
- SANMARTÍN BASTIDA, Rebeca, and MASSIP BONET, Francesc (2017), «La danza de espadas en *El libro del conorte* de Juana de la Cruz», *Revista de poética medieval*, 31, pp. 15-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/RPM.2017.31.0.58478>.
- STICCA, Sandro (1988), *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, Joseph R. Berrigan (trans.). Athens/London: University of Georgia Press.

- SURTZ, Ronald E. (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.
- TENERIO, Francisco de, and ESCOBAR, Luis (1526), *Passio duorum: Tractado de devotísimas y muy lastimosas contemplaciones de la pasión del Hijo de Dios y compassion de la Virgen sancta María, su madre*. Valladolid: Nicolás Tyerri.
- TIMMERMANN, Achim (2001), «The Avenging Crucifix: Some Observations on the Iconography of the Living Cross», *Gesta*, 40:2, pp. 141-160. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/767243>.
- TROIANO, Alfredo (2024), «“Quella cotale presenza della sua umanità passionata”: Immagini e affetti nello *Specchio di croce* di Domenico Cavalca», *Specula: Revista de Humanidades y Espiritualidad*, 8, pp. 33-77.
- TWOMEY, Lesley (2013), *The Fabric of Marian Devotion in Isabel de Villena's Vita Christi*. Woodbridge, England: Tamesis.
- WEISS, Jessica (2022), «Art Patronized and Collected by Queen Isabel», in Hilaire Kallendorf (coord.), *A Companion to the Queenship of Isabel la Católica*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 113-157. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004521520_006.
- WEISSBERGER, Barbara F. (2009), «Motherhood and Ritual Murder in Medieval Spain and England», *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 39:1, pp. 7-30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2008-011>.
- WHINNOM, Keith (1963), «The Supposed Sources of Inspiration of Spanish Fifteenth-Century Narrative Religious Verse», *Symposium*, 17, pp. 268-291. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.1963.10732789>.
- ZARRI, Gabriella (1996), «Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century», in Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (co-ords.), *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 219-304.

Recibido: 28/12/2023

Aceptado: 28/03/2024



FLYING, FIGHTING, AND FORGIVING. THE MATERIALITY OF THE LIVING
CROSS IN THE VISIONARY SERMONS OF JUANA DE LA CRUZ

ABSTRACT: Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534), abbess of a *beaterio* turned Clarisan convent, was known as a «living saint» for her Marian visions and for the weekly *sermones* during which Jesus reportedly spoke through her enraptured body to extend the biblical narratives and describe celestial festivities. Juana's Passion spirituality led her to contemplate the materiality of the *arma Christi*; in particular, the physicality of the cross as splintery yet living wood influenced Juana's images of the cross as at once instrument of torture leading to death, while also as triumphant, animate, and even violent. In her visionary sermons, Juana takes the animate materiality of this «holy matter» to its logical extreme, presenting the cross as able to mutate, feed others, enact the liturgy, and subdue the seraphim in a heavenly battle, all actions that helped justify the ultimate action of the living cross participating in the Last Judgment.

KEYWORDS: Holy matter. Living saint. *Arma Christi*. Female visionaries. Imaginative theology. Passion. Last Judgment.

VOLANDO, PELEANDO, Y PERDONANDO. LA MATERIALIDAD DE LA CRUZ
VIVA EN LOS SERMONES VISIONARIOS DE JUANA DE LA CRUZ

RESUMEN: Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534), abadesa de un beaterio reformado como convento de clarisas, tenía la reputación de ser «santa viva» por sus visiones marianas y por los sermones semanales en los que Jesús, según se dice, hablaba a través de su cuerpo arrobado, dando detalles sobre escenas bíblicas y fiestas celestiales. Sus meditaciones sobre la Pasión la llevaron a la contemplación de la materialidad de los *arma Christi*. La madera viva de la cruz llena de astillas le daba la idea de una cruz que era no solo un instrumento de tortura, sino a la vez un objeto triunfal, animado, incluso violento. En sus sermones visionarios, Juana trata la idea de una «materialidad santa» hasta sus últimas consecuencias, dando noticias de una cruz que puede transformarse, dar de comer a otros, celebrar la misa y ganar batallas contra los serafines, todo con el fin de justificar cómo la cruz viva podría participar como juez en el juicio final.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Materialidad santa. Santa viva. *Arma Christi*. Visionarias. Teología imaginativa. La Pasión. Juicio final.