

*The Mystic of Tunja: The Writings of Madre Castillo, 1671–1742.*

By KATHRYN JOY MCKNIGHT. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.

Photographs. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xviii, 284 pp.

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As a feminist literary critic who desires social change, Kathryn Joy McKnight seeks to unearth female agency in the tradition of women's writing. Her project is to "uncover spaces and forces of resistance in the history of literary production, places where writers who were in some way marginalized contested those master narratives that represented them in ways most convenient to the dominant social forces" (p. 7). In *The Mystic of Tunja*, she locates this female agency, these "spaces and forces of resistance," in the narrative style and writing strategies employed by Madre Castillo, a nun in the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Convento Real de Santa Clara in Tunja, Nuevo Reino de Granada (present-day Colombia).

One of McKnight's most laudable efforts is to delineate the connections between Madre Castillo's unique experience and the larger traditions and contexts within which her history becomes meaningful to the reader. In the book's first section, McKnight deals with the historical and theoretical emergence of the *Vida espiritual* genre from the broader practice of autobiographical writing. Some readers may not be satisfied with the historical evidence McKnight amasses in this section to argue for the birth, in early modern Europe, of the phenomenon of "human subjecthood" in opposition to the rigidity of the "static" Middle Ages. But she does provide a convincing identification of several defining characteristics of the writing strategies used in the *Vida*, paying careful attention, among other things, to gender differences manifested in them and to the contradictory elements of self-denigration and self-elevation dictated by both the genre's demand that its authors engage in harsh self-judgments and by writers' conflicting desires for self-expression and promotion.

In what is perhaps the most impressive section of the book, McKnight outlines the history of both female monasticism and religious women's writings, and studies Madre Castillo's participation in both. Using a variety of sources, including the often difficult to access convent materials, McKnight also provides a valuable and evocative reconstruction of the history of the Convento Real de Santa Clara and of Madre Castillo's experiences in it. She discusses the convent's less than perfect adherence to the Council of Trent's (1545–63) strict directives regarding monastic life, and she traces Madre Castillo's life-long struggle with worldly matters. In this material McKnight uncovers evidence revealing that while Madre Castillo often presented herself as a self-denigrating and humble subject in her writings—treated in more detail in the book's final section, a series of close readings of four of Madre Castillo's literary productions—the archival sources paint a picture of her acting, in her professional capacities, in a much more assertive and politically astute light. The existence of this narrative discrepancy is key to McKnight's argument that Madre Castillo's historical agency was located in the rhetorical devices she employed in the creation of her literary narratives.

Each component of *The Mystic of Tunja* contains thoughtful analysis and carefully documented information of use to historians, literary scholars, and feminist critics. As regards McKnight's central argument, however, the sum may not be greater than each of its component parts. While McKnight leaves us with a richer understanding of how Madre Castillo's life and writings were both unique to, and representative of, the historical traditions within which they were situated, it is less clear if McKnight has achieved her primary goal of demonstrating that the essence of Madre Castillo's historical agency was expressed in the "slippages" contained in the ambiguities between Madre Castillo's discourses and her practices.

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*Relaciones y visitas a los Andes, S. XVI*. 4 vols. Edited by HERMES TOVAR PINZÓN. Santafé de Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica, 1993–97. Plates. Maps. Tables. Notes. 472, 436, 501, 498 pp. Paper.

Those familiar with the *Relaciones geográficas de Indias, Perú*, edited first by Marcos Jiménez de la Espada in the late nineteenth century, will recognize the rough outlines of the material published in these volumes, for there is some overlap. But Tovar Pinzón provides a modern and better transcription of the early reports, as well as important editorial comments. Each volume, in fact, begins with an extensive introduction by Tovar Pinzón; collectively these constitute an overview of Colombia's experience of contact between the European and Amerindian worlds of the sixteenth century. There is a basic spatial organization selected by the editor, and within that framework the temporal aspect unfolds. The second volume focuses on Colombia's Caribbean, the third on the central-eastern sector, and the fourth on the Upper Magdalena. Chronologically, the earliest reports date from the 1530s, and the latest from 1611.

Many of the reports, found in various archives, are published here for the first time. This is least true of the first volume, where 10 of 14 *relaciones* have been published elsewhere, although most are now difficult to locate. But of the 17 reports in the second volume, only two have appeared previously; in the third volume, 4 of 12 had already been published. All material in volume 4 is published here for the first time, including the very important detailed *visitas* of the encomiendas in the province of Mariquita that took place between 1559 and 1563 (housed in the Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá), and early-seventeenth-century reports on the Pijao (found in the Archivo General de Indias, Seville).

Together, these volumes should be made available in all major libraries, for they provide a firsthand look at early American society and are a gold mine for student research efforts. Professor Tovar Pinzón, on the basis of the quality of the transcriptions and his historical essays, is to be congratulated on a major contribution to the scholarship on the early colonial northern Andes.

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