

Estrada's approach to these icons is to examine in depth important cultural texts that engage with the complexity of these female icons, from like soap operas that recycle received ideologies to deconstructive works of fiction in which there is an inquiry into the process of iconization and a layered portrayal of the clash between nationally serviceable icons and the contradictions of female empowerment in explicitly male-centered societies and their official histories. The result makes for exceptionally interesting critical readings. *Troubled Memories* may well serve as a model for parallel studies of female icons and feminist sociocultural discourses in other Latin American national traditions.

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**Juárez-Almendros, Encarnación. *Disabled Bodies in early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints*. Liverpool University Press, 2017. 201 pp.**

Encarnación Juárez-Almendros' meticulous study of women's roles in early modern Spanish literature opens our eyes to a vanished world of discrimination, neglect, and false beliefs. This volume sets out to analyze the roles of women as represented in both literature and personal writings in the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries from a feminist and disability perspective. In particular, the author focuses on the ways in which the female body was conceptualized, controlled, and denigrated by the social construction and conformity of the time. She theorizes that having a female body in early modern Spain was to be subject to a cognitive and socialized framework of disability. Women were consigned to being inferior by males in power in ecclesiastical, legal, governmental, as well as informal settings. Simply as a result of their embodiment, women endured rejection, stigmatization, lack of freedom and scant personal development.

The introduction provides a significant overview of Disability Studies, which situates this analysis within the parameters of theoretical approaches on this topic. The chapters that follow scrupulously examine early medical, religious and literary texts that illustrate the culture and beliefs that resulted in the conclusion that women's bodies were weak and inferior. Juárez-Almendros consults examples of early Spanish literature to survey and analyze the representation of prostitutes and syphilitic female bodies over time, noting a change from strong female characters in the fifteenth century to repulsive sub-human beings with defective bodies in the seventeenth century. She concludes that the presence of syphilis in women of early modern Spain was used by religious and moral powers to justify the inferior role of women in society and was "used as a significant trope to express alterity and rejection of difference in the period (75).

A further analysis of early modern Spanish literature reveals a disparaging view of aging women, those whose wizened features and gnarled joints are testimonies to their defective and unproductive bodies. Early modern Spanish authors generally presented aging women in a degrading way, as comic figures or witches. Juárez-Almendros notes that *Compendio*, a fifteenth-century medical text, warns its readers to be wary of aging women (85). Aging women often served as healers and midwives, positions which were downplayed, brought into disrepute, and mistrusted. Juárez-Almendros explores the relationship between the Spanish Inquisition and the treatment of aging female bodies, citing the persecution of

some aging women as witches in order to discredit the work of female healers, who were in competition with the work of well-educated doctors. Juárez-Almendros examines several literary figures who symbolize this struggle between traditional and university-trained healers, such as Celestina (from *La Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas), Trotaconventos (from *Libro de buen amor* by Juan Ruiz, Arcipreste de Hita), Cañizares (from *Coloquio de los perros* by Miguel de Cervantes), and Aldonza de San Pedro (from *El Buscón* by Francisco de Quevedo), tracing how the devaluation of aging women grew through the centuries. In each instance the women are depicted as useless, immoral, dangerous, and in conflict with the dominant societal standard. The author concludes that aging women are “emblematic of fictional disability in early modern Spanish literature” (107).

In the last section of the book, Juárez-Almendros connects her research in the history and culture of disability in early modern Spain to the first-person testimony of Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582), a Carmelite nun who was canonized in 1622, and who may have suffered from ecstatic epilepsy. She recorded her pain and suffering, as well as her dynamic and ecstatic visions and experiences in the narrative, *Libro de la vida*. Juárez-Almendros executes a complex analysis of this text, which she feels demonstrates Santa Teresa’s efforts to bridge the gap between her physical symptoms and her mystical episodes and is both a “public apology and elucidation of the incidents of her body” (119). In addition, it is noteworthy that Teresa de Ávila recognized the early modern concept of female weakness, but at the same time asserted her resistance to it by testifying to her total acceptance of her own physical embodiment. Juárez-Almendros explains that her purpose in writing a disability analysis of Teresa de Ávila’s text was to add to the understanding of how complex individual impairments interconnect with accepted belief systems and social discrimination (151).

This book adds a unique perspective to the body of work on early modern Spain and women. The feminist disability approach to narratives about disabled female bodies gives the reader intimate access to prostitutes, disabled and aging women through their embodiment as well as through their interactions with the world around them. It helps the reader to place the women in both a historical and physical context and to understand their struggle with the male imposition of such beliefs as imperfection, stigmatization, subjugation, and lack of freedom. Juárez-Almendros’ examination of Teresa de Ávila’s singular text, *Libro de la vida*, is the culmination of an enlightening look at women and disability in early modern Spain. In Teresa de Ávila the reader observes her acceptance of her very being and finds a key to how she used that being to move beyond embodiment to enlightenment, that is, to insight, understanding, awareness, wisdom, learning, and mystical experience. Her complex embodiment yielded a complex spirit. This book is an exemplary feminist study of the causes and effects of disability, natural or imposed, on women in early modern Spain.

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