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Bodies Beyond Labels: Finding Joy in the Shadows of Imperial Spain ed. by Daniel Holcombe and Frederick A. De Armas
(review)

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Holcombe, Daniel, and Frederick A. De Armas, eds. *Bodies Beyond Labels: Finding Joy in the Shadows of Imperial Spain*. U of Toronto P, 2024. 331 pp. ISBN: 978 1487556891.

In *Bodies Beyond Labels*, editors Daniel Holcombe and Frederick A. De Armas assemble an impressive group of luminaries and promising young scholars to celebrate fleeting yet perceptible moments of early modern queerness, while eschewing fixed labels and identities. The collection contends that despite the shadow of heteronormativity and patriarchy in Imperial Spain, the light of non-normativity shines through its artistic, theatrical, and historical sources. Positioned within a broader re-evaluation of the body, gender, and sexuality, unbound of labels, and tackling a wide temporal and geographic expanse, joy conceptually ties twelve articles that together display a remarkable methodological variety.

Readers of *Hispanófila* are sure to appreciate the variety of approaches to queerness, homoeroticism, gender fluidity, and performativity as contributors explore the psychological and religious dimensions of joy and engage its broad semantic network in Spanish as *gozo*, *alegría*, *deleite*, and *juego*. Joy knits the collection's five thematic divisions together, such as "Part Two: Homoeroticism as Joyous Loving" or "Part Five: Finding Joy in Unexpected Places: Geographies of Sexual Exploration." However, in this review, I group the papers into three interweaving currents to underscore the productivity of the field's expanding methodologies.

The first current examines same-sex desire and un-fixed identities in canon classics of the Golden Age. Frederick De Armas and Felipe E. Rojas first direct our attention to the gazes at and between Jupiter and his favorite cupbearer, Ganymede. In dialogue with German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity*, De Armas elucidates ekphrastic visions of the dashing handsome server in Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza*, and Rojas contends Tirso de Molina daringly integrates the same myth into his religious comedy, *La mejor espigadera*. Shifting our gaze to enclosed spaces, Lizette Arellano shines a spotlight on Serafina's performance in *El vergonzoso en palacio* to posit the garden as a site of gender-fluid performance, and Pablo Restrepo Gautier draws our attention to the joyous silences of newlywed bliss in Pedro de Navarro's *El casamiento entre dos damas*. These contributions demonstrate resonances between the light of the theatrical gaze and the shadows, silences, and secret gardens that enclose bodies within unlabeled delights —acceptable and yet titillating on the early modern stage.

A second current addresses visual representations of homoeroticism and fluid identities in early modern and contemporary works. Daniel Holcombe evaluates the homoaffective postures of the famed *los dos amigos*, Anselmo and Lotario, in illustrations of *Don Quixote*, and Jose R. Cartagena-Calderón illuminates the sensual poses of early modernity's hunkiest saint, San Sebastian, featuring famed artists and sculptors Jusepe de Ribera, El Greco, and Carlo Saraceni. María José Domínguez finds joy in new representations of the ever-ephemeral Dulcinea, housed in the Dulcinea Graphic Humor Museum in Toboso. Collectively, these contributions invite reflection upon the shifting visibility of non-labeled bodies and the homoerotic gaze in art from antiquity to today.

At the nexus of contemporary theatrics and latent early modern homoeroticism, Emilie L. Bergmann engages texts that illuminate Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's evident intimacy with María Luisa Manrique de Lara, Condesa de Paredes. Bergmann introduces a shift in the volume from theatrics and imagery to mark a critical dissonance between modern perception and historicity by outlining the conflict between Octavio Paz's reticence towards any homoeroticism in Sor Juana's corpus and contemporary stagings by playwrights Rosario Castellanos and Jesusa Rodríguez who fully embrace Sor Juana as a feminist and lesbian icon.

In this vein, Barbara Mujica analyzes correspondences between Carmelite nuns under the auspice of the Teresian term "special friendships." Mujica signals notable intimacies between Carmelite leaders Ana de Jesús and Beatriz de la Concepción and between Saint Teresa of Ávila and a preferred disciple, María de San José, that cannot be readily dismissed as heteronormative. At the same time, she reminds of the work that remains to unpack the effusive rhetorical cadences of women's robust epistolary practices that grant insight into the intimacies and intricacies of the homosocial relationships that characterized early modern life.

Further unveiling the intimate dances of light amidst the shadow of Imperial Spain, Jessica A. Boon's exceptionally well-written article, "Trans-*figura*-d in Joy: The Sensuality of Celestial Feasts in the Pageants of Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534)" is itself a joy to read. At times funny, at times devastating, Boon draws on her expertise in Religious Studies to reveal the transcendent joy portrayed in the sermons and autobiographical writings of sixteenth-century visionary Juana de la Cruz. Among many remarkable visions examined in the article, one is particularly haunting: as the Virgin Mary dances naked while her body transforms through puberty, she offers her breasts to be fondled by God in return for the release of souls from purgatory (261–263). In this example and others, Boon demonstrates the "light" of fluidity, play, and joy are not incompatible with the shadow of empire, but are instead integrated into the eroticism and latent sexual violence of the era.

Enhancing the framing of *Bodies Beyond Labels*, two contributions illuminate the inherent fluidity of labeling practices in early modernity. Gil-Oslé moves us beyond Iberia to contrast anthropological attitudes towards global sexual practices as expressed in the travel writings of Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and Antonio Pigafetta. In a fitting close to the volume, Gregory S. Hutcheson's meticulous analysis of Gregorio López's glosses of Alfonso X's *Siete partidas*, reveals the mutability of the term "sodomy" within early modern juridical discourse and calls "to start our enquiry not with the labels but with the acts themselves" (331).

Standing provocatively with an unapologetic optimism, *Bodies Beyond Labels* is a timely contribution to the field that exemplifies the strength of interdisciplinary approaches within Hispanism to foster a rigorous evaluation of the visibilities and invisibilities of queer joy —past and present.

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