

THE HERESY OF LOVE

Helen Edmundson

SISTER JUANA: I will not renounce my life. I know you have condemned me for writing plays and poems for the Court, but I do not regret them. For they are tales of love, of care, of despair and of devotion too; all the things which make us what we are. And there are prelates came before you, and will come after you, I think, who see no harm in them at all.

Nor can I regret the thoughts which I expressed upon your sermon. For are not all opinions put forth to be considered and responded to? Is that not the key to our progression? And why should men reserve all right to speak and write theology? If my thoughts are as learned, as exacting as a man's, why should they not be heard? And I have heard and read some poor and crude theology from men and yet it's given credence. If my arguments are flawed, if I am not as well informed as I should be, then criticise me, yes. And I will go away and think again and learn some more, and try again to reach towards the truth. Why should our faith fear knowledge? For knowledge comes from Him. And without it we would be as animals, wading through the mud and slime. Why should that light of knowledge be less precious, less miraculous in my mind than in yours? Where in the Bible does it say that girls cannot be wise? Show me, prove to me beyond all doubt that fact, and I will then be silent.

There is no Devil in me. Nor do I do the Devil's work. You call on devils, I suppose, for want of any answer. Why do you not look at me?...

I think you are afraid of me. Of all my sex. Why? Because we cannot be controlled? Or perhaps it is yourself you fear. Because to look on woman is to know you are a man. A human being. With all the frailty that implies. And all those hours you spend at night denying your humanity, they melt away. And you are left exposed! Power. That's what you prize above all else. You use it as your shield.

You say that I abuse my faith, but I say it is you who do so. Faith should not be used to subjugate, nor to degrade. Faith should not enslave our minds, but open them. It is... a flight. An expansion. An endless universe of light. I am condemned. Yes. That I know. But you cannot reach my sense of God. You cannot reach my faith.