Tradition, Rhetoric, and Propriety in Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz.

Lilian Albertina Contreras-silva

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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TRADITION, RHETORIC, AND PROPRIETY IN SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

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by

Lilian A. Contreras-Silva
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1994
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1997
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the three muses, Ana Julia, Julio Mario, and Raúl Alberto,

who have continuously amazed me by revealing to me the beauty behind reality.
Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by acknowledging those professors who have guided my education from the very beginning: Doctors James Hardy, Carolyn Jones Medine, Kenneth Kitchell, J. Bainard Cowan, and J. Randolph LeBlanc have been instrumental in my development as a student, as a teacher, and as a person. Since my freshman year and throughout the whole of my college career (undergraduate, graduate, and otherwise), these individuals have provided me with sometimes applicable but always loving and unforgettable advice. Special thanks goes to my dissertation committee, Doctors Kate Jensen, Carolyn Jones Medine, James Hardy, Gale Carrithers, and (of course) J. Bainard Cowan, for guiding the process and giving me vital feedback. I sincerely thank Doctors Joseph Ricapito and Tamra Horton for their endless motivation and guidance. My heartfelt thanks goes to the L.S.U. Honors College for providing a home away from home. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Michelle Balan and Sandi Farrell for their constant support and affection.

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Abstract

The writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz serve as her personal proclamation for the right of a woman to write and lead an intellectual life. The study begins by reviewing the Baroque world and its artistic trends. This is done in chapter one so that Sor Juana's artistic production can be better situated in the world at large. In chapter two, the study proceeds to review the professional nature of Sor Juana's writing. By observing the diverse nature of the nun's work, as well as the compensation for much of it, the nature of Sor Juana's motivation for writing can be clearly stated as professional. This allows for the study of her literature as literature designed to read and analyzed.

In the third chapter, the focus is on the themes of women and gender roles as Sor Juana interpreted them from the writings of the Church Fathers. In her poetry, the nun clearly states that by denying her gender role and becoming a nun she gains the right to participate in the intellectual world of men. This assertion is further supported by her use of famous female figures of the religious tradition. The fourth chapter focuses on the depiction of the Virgin Mary in Sor Juana’s religious poetry. The poet presents a vibrant and forceful Mary actively fighting the forces of evil. I argue that this representation serves to redefine the roles appropriate to women: obviously, if Mary the mother of God was allowed to be an active agent in the name of God, then women were not divinely barred from active agency.

In chapter five, the focus shifts to the use of other mujeres sabias that the nun relies upon to declare her right to write. The women, taken from Biblical stories and traditional mythology, are all presented as examples of the greatness that women can
achieve. The final chapter, studying Sor Juana's love poetry, reaffirms the belief that Sor Juana wrote in order to argue that women deserved the right to be educated and to be treated as intellectually capable members of society.
Introduction

At a time when the intellectual capacities of women were believed to be limited, Sor Juana’s writings emphatically argued for women’s ability and right to write. Through the act of writing, Sor Juana presented a constant challenge to the idea that women were incapable of intellectual greatness. The texts she created were clear declarations of the greatness of women’s potential, intellectual and otherwise. This study is to be part of a sector of Sor Juana criticism which never reaches to clarify a vision of the state of the spirit in which she wrote. This work is an attempt to look not into an author’s soul in the moment of artistic creation, but, instead, in a tangible fashion, to look at the texts themselves. By accepting her as a professional writer and her texts as carefully designed, it is possible to study and learn from the rhetoric she utilized. Though much of the criticism has focused on the state of the “Baroque soul” of the author1 (an incomprehensible distinction, since I find it impossible for any soul not to be Baroque), I am attempting to study the social and political aspects of Sor Juana’s writing. In this study, the emphasis is placed on the nun’s rhetoric and technique as well as the active role her writings enjoyed in the secular traditions. In order to study the texts without relying on assumptions of the Baroque soul of this Mexican nun, it is necessary to see Sor Juana’s writings as a deliberate participation in the discourses of

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1 The study of Baroque literature or other works of art, for some critics, is only worthwhile if it is transformed into a study of the spirit in crisis which produces the texts. Critics who have attempted to follow the approach that focuses on the practical aspects of her writings and not psychic considerations of the author as seen through the texts have faced stinging criticism. As one critic states of the aforementioned approach: “hay amplios sectores de la critica que siguen sin llegar a ese punto de vision integral” (Orozco Diaz 31) ‘there are extensive critical sectors that proceed without coming to this point of integral vision.’ By becoming a part of this criticism that is lacking a unifying and simplifying vision of Sor Juana and her writings, I hope to provide a realistic and non-limiting view of her skill.
the public sphere. This approach mandates perceiving her as a professional writer, since all other perceptions would deny the calculated and guarded nature of her texts.

Sor Juana, when recognized as a professional writer, provides a perfect case study of an author whose precarious social situation made it necessary for her to call extensively on the resources of rhetoric. Since she wrote in the Baroque Era, when the most public function of art was religious propaganda, it is difficult to conceive that such a gifted and prolific author would not participate in her own propaganda campaign as well as that of the Catholic Church. Sor Juana wrote of many subjects. Like any professional writer whose main interest is to garner and keep the interest and support of her patrons and readers, Sor Juana wrote in the styles and of themes that would be of interest to her audience. One of the themes that Sor Juana chose to write about often is that of the greatness of the women seen in the catalog of exemplary women of antiquity, and religious figures like the Virgin Mary. Through her writing, her only public voice, Sor Juana attempted to protect her freedom to write. Through her texts, through the use of rhetoric and tradition, and careful always to adhere to the rules of propriety, Sor Juana creates an argument of self-liberation.

The importance of studying Sor Juana as a professional writer consciously participating in the discussion of women's right to education lies in the fact that Sor Juana can serve as an example of the kind of simplistic and minimizing criticism that women authors have suffered. "Today," it is noted by a literary critic, "feminist scholars argue about what the object of their inquiry ought to be. Is it women themselves, their lives and traditions, or is it the relations between men and women,
their interlocking lives and traditions? The argument is serious, for a scholar’s response will determine her, or his, methods, questions, and conclusions” (Stimpson vii). The study of an individual female author helps determine the type of approach that is applied to women writers in general.

In the figure of this Mexican nun the critical underestimation of women can be clearly seen. For centuries, assumptions of mental pathology or of overwhelming emotional states have diminished the nun’s standing as an author and as an active agent. The criticism of Sor Juana and her works have suffered from an unbelievable lack of objectivity. As one critic notes:

so many Sor Juanas are given to us: “a rare woman,” “but not a remarkable poet,” in the style of Gongora, a conceptist, a mystic, not a mystic, a narcissist, butch, cosmopolitan, “extemporaneous,” Cartesian, not Cartesian, feminist, an exemplary daughter of the Church, a compendium of literary resources of the Siglo de Oro. The image of the poet multiplies, since it is incredibly diverse (this is according to the attempts to capture her). Let it be admitted, that within the framework of Mexican letters, Mother Juana Inés has been transformed into a type of Rorschach. Badly concealed ignorance of cultural values and history and false supposed prejudices, unconscious though no less harmful, restrict more than one critic of Sor Juana.
The many different versions of Sor Juana that are provided by the criticism seem to reflect more the beliefs of the critics themselves than any conclusions that can be drawn from the texts written by Sor Juana.

Following the idea that the writings of women have been studied in a limited manner, yielding only fragmentary results, we can state that the terminology utilized to study female writers can be seen as artifacts and as mirrors of the way that women are seen in this society. As one critic clearly states, "language and the general patterns of its use can be taken as an index of culturally shared or predominant attitudes and values connected with women and men, with sexuality, and with the sexual distribution of social roles and statuses. The range of forms of expression available for speaking of a particular topic (terms that refer to prostitutes, for example) and their interconnections can be viewed either as a cultural artifact, bearing testimony to the past, or as a mirror of sociocultural patterns widely operative in the contemporary situation (or both)" (McConnell-Ginet et al. 5). The way Sor Juana is read by the critics, then, reflects the way modern critics see women in general. Still speaking of the language use of Sor Juana, the question moves on to the interaction between her language use and her social status. As another critic puts it, "the unique contribution anthropology can make to the study of language and gender is its exploration of how language use informs and is informed by the larger social and cultural patterns of which it is an element" (Borker 26). However, this has not been the focus of study when Sor Juana is read as a female writer.
A brief review of the criticism will be sufficient to show the great disservice done to all when women and their products are underestimated by the academy. In the past, criticism of Sor Juana’s work has been mostly centered on the few known biographical facts and hypotheses of the poet’s psychology. Her skills as a writer, a creator of fiction, have been seen as secondary to the assumption that as a woman writing she was driven by motivations other than creativity. As one critic astutely notes:

In spite of the fact that she was famous and her work well known, until quite recently the study of Sor Juana has been with few exceptions both limited and distorted. Attitudes about morality, religion, and sexuality have charged Sor Juana criticism with bias and tendentiousness and have led to curious literary battles. Some critics have wanted to see her as a mystic, others as an atheist; some as a jilted or fallen woman, others as a tortured lesbian. (Arenal Convent 181)

In a strange paradox, though the admirable quality of her work was enough to grant her the freedom to write during her lifetime, it is not sufficient for her modern critics to spare her the crudest of stereotypical assumptions for female writers. Obviously not finding her texts interesting enough, critics have relied on suppositions of her personal

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2 In summarizing the approach of José María Pemán, one critic states that: “[Pemán] comienza por señalar la turbación que la condición femenina de Sor Juana produce en los críticos, y avanza en busca de rasgos psicológicos para entrar en el casi inevitable terreno de las experiencias vitales de la poetisa . . .” (Sainz de Medrano 10) ‘[Pemán] begins by pointing out the upheaval that Sor Juana’s feminine condition produces in the critics, and proceeds in search of psychological traces in order to enter in the almost inevitable terrain of the poet’s life experiences.’ This quote shows that even those critics aware of the sexist treatment of Sor Juana feel a compulsion to participate. The critical impulse to view her literary production primarily as a symptom and, therefore, a key to unraveling her psychological state is due to the assumption that she is “abnormal” among her sex for writing. Corroborating this opinion, one critic states that: “es evidente que Sor Juana dejó muchas lagunas en su autobiografía, lagunas que sus apasionados críticos han tratado de rellenar interpretando textos poéticos . . . Y está claro que la condición femenina de esta criatura humana es determinante en tal obsesión” (Sainz de Medrano 7) ‘it is evident that Sor Juana left many holes in her autobiography, holes that her impassioned critics have attempted to fill by interpreting the poetic texts . . . And it is clear the feminine condition of this human creature is a determinant in that obsession.”
life. These suppositions are in great part based on the assumption that women write only due to some sort of psychopathy.

At question is her value as a philosopher, a theologian, or even an independent thinker. Many critics have highlighted her “femininity” and in so doing dismiss her skills as a writer and a rhetorician. As in any other author, the criticism of her works has been evolving since she first published. The earliest line of criticism includes the view that she was a divinely inspired author, a truly good woman, and that her work upheld and revered Catholic dogma. In this half of the century, the most popular line of criticism has followed a psychoanalytic approach to reading the poet and her works. In this approach, some critics have read all of her texts as compulsory acts of a vivid psychopathy, mostly sexual in nature. Newer criticism on Sor Juana’s work have an increased focus on the texts themselves but still rely on basic psychoanalytic assumptions of the author for the interpretations of the texts.

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1 As Stephanie Merrim states of Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, that: “in highlighting her ‘female’ emotions and motivations, this external line of criticism domesticates Sor Juana, conforming her life story to a more conventional feminine mode” (Toward 17). The rhetoric of the critic, in this case, is to accentuate the stereotypes of the gender of the poet (in this case of effusive and spontaneous thought construction) in order to create an image of the nun that complies with his expectations of women. According to Merrim, this is not the only critic who does this. It is pointed out that while Menéndez y Pelayo calls her poetry “spontaneous,” Karl Vossler sees her poetry as “natural” (Merrim Toward 18).

2 Critics such as Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo (a cleric), Padre Diego Calleja (her first biographer), and Alfonso Méndez Plancarte portrayed her as a model nun and provide readings of Sor Juana’s works and life that portray her in a manner that is far from challenging.

3 Ludwig Pfandl, in his psychoanalytic reading of the poet and her works, sees Sor Juana as a neurotic “intersexual” who, true to Freudian fashion, killed off her father by writing. Rosa Chacel attempts to delineate Sor Juana’s psychology through her poems and sees Sor Juana as “poeta de la circunstancia” while maintaining a stance aligned with Pfandl. Octavio Paz follows a psychoanalytic approach in his attempt to “resolve” the poet and her life. Paz does not fully accept Pfandl’s view of Sor Juana’s psychology; he presents a slightly different take on Sor Juana’s psychological state in which she does not kill off her father but instead becomes her mother in her father’s affection. Stephanie Merrim, though not as Freudian in her reading, does not believe Paz to be incorrect in his evaluation of Sor Juana’s psyche.
There are a great many works dealing with formal aspects of her poetry or with specific texts, like *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* and *El Sueño*. These studies tend to overlook Sor Juana's large and diverse collections of writings in order to create coherence which is missing in the totality of her texts. Some critics have read Sor Juana with an interest in social and historical aspects, such as finding the precursors for a national literature of Mexico. Like Octavo Paz, many have attempted the incredible task of situating the whole of her works and her person within an interpretive context that would conclusively define and delineate her essence. There are critics, however,

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6 The studies of the formal aspects of Sor Juana’s poetry include works by Tomás Navarro Tomás, Victorino Polo García (“Formulación poética-del soneto: Sor Juana Inés, Rubén Darío, Guillermo Valencia” in *Anales de Literatura hispanoamericana*; Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1979), José Antonio Mayoral (“Poética y retórica de un subgénero popular. Los ‘villancicos-ensalada’ de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” in *La relaciones literarias entre España e Iberoamérica. XXIII Congreso del Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana*; Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1987). Critics of her religious plays include Imanol San José Azueta (“Sobre una posible influencia hermética en *El Divino Narciso* de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” *Letras-de-Deusto* 19.43 [1989]: 109-120) and Angel Valbuena Briones. José Gaos studies *El Sueño* through a philosophical approach, breaking it up into five parts and delineating images and their sources.

7 Enrique Diez Canedo (“Perfil de Sor Juana” in *Letras de América*; Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1944) sees Sor Juana in relation with Mexican and Mexican identity (Sainz de Medrano 9). The same is said of Federico de Onís who sees a prefiguration of Hispanic American identity and literary style in Sor Juana (Sainz de Medrano 9). The theme of an “Americanism” found in the theater of Sor Juana is supported by critics such as Francisco Monterde and María Esther Pérez. Of course, as a reaction to such speculations there are those who assert that Sor Juana is truly a Spanish author who happens to be writing from the periphery. Celsa Carmen García Valdés makes this assertion in her study of *Los empeños de una casa* (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1989). José María de Cossío presents Sor Juana as an intrinsic part of Spanish literature with no mention of any Mexican identity. He also recreates Sor Juana’s biography based on her works. This issue can be further examined in the work of Magdalena Galindo, “Fundación de la nacionalidad. Sor Juana y la patria mexicana” (*Los empeños: ensayos en homenaje a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, Ed. Sergio Fernández; Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995; 63-72).

8 Merrim sees Paz’s attempt as one of “an ambitious project of re-creation . . . of Sor Juana’s world” (Merrim Toward 12). Paz is not the only critic who attempts to “recreate” Sor Juana’s world. In his own introduction, Julio Jiménez Rueda presents his book as an attempt to crystallize the essential moments of Sor Juana’s life, situate the author in her environment (countryside, court, and cloister) and present her daily interactions (family, admirers, and clerics), as well as conjecture the thoughts and feelings that led her to write. The close readings are accompanied by semi-poetic suppositions. Ramón Xirau attempts to place Sor Juana and her work within the framework of the baroque. He studies the figure and
who have clearly seen her as a creative and energetic author who may or may not have
had psychotic tendencies.\(^9\)

In short, the evolution and stagnation in the criticism of Sor Juana leads to the
conclusion that there is a preponderance of analyses that base their readings on a
supposed psychology. This approach is not just insulting to Sor Juana and all women, it
is also insulting to the critic, for it is incredibly naive:

If anything was typical of the seventeenth century it was that almost
nothing was taken—or expressed—at face value. Neither life nor letters
were approached simply and directly in that Baroque time. It is
surprising that so many critics have understood both the letter from Sor
Filotea and the answer to it as generous and almost ingenuous. But in
view of attitudes about women, it is not surprising. Smart women were
seen as precocious children. (Arenal Convent 176)

Everything from Baroque style to the level of rhetoric used by the nun points to a more
complex and distinct process of creation than can be attributed to psychology and its
needs. The literary prowess of the nun, since it is couched in studies of her supposedly
infirm psyche, has been considered to be a complete anomaly. In this way, it is
alienated from the issues that were important to Sor Juana, such as women’s right to an
education. When seen as an anomaly amongst women, and even called manly by some,
the figure of Sor Juana stands as an underestimation of the female sex.

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\(^9\) Raquel Asúin points out the author’s versatility and her willingness to experiment. She places
Sor Juana within existing literary traditions and styles (Sainz de Medrano 15). Unamuno sees her ability to
create not only fictional characters but also to present herself according to her own fancy (Sainz de
Medrano 7).
This view, of female greats as anomalies among women, can be clearly identified as antifeminist in sentiment. The depiction of Sor Juana in this manner allowed for the perseverance of the status quo since the position of women in general did not have to be elevated. As Merrim states:

In the early modern period learned women increasingly made their way into the public sphere. Nuns or otherwise, they continued . . . to incite far more anxiety and disapproval than admiration. However, a means was carved out of the antifeminist climate to accommodate the learned woman when, for example, her achievements—as did Sor Juana’s—could serve as a monument to Culture. No new paradigm, embracing the learned woman without qualification, yet emerged; instead the seventeenth century drew on the classical construct of the Tenth Muse (first applied to Sappho) to frame a space of exceptionality for learned women. Should it be so desired, the learned woman would be celebrated as an exception to her sex, as prodigious, as a rara avis, as a freak. (Merrim Early 30)

This is especially of interest, considering that Sor Juana utilized the figures of exceptional women (other Tenth Muses) in order to create for herself a space for intellectual activity. Sor Juana’s use of the Speculum will be studied in more detail in chapter 6 of this work.

Of course, all of this leads to the question of the difference between women’s writing and men’s writing. The assumed role of personal emotion and effusiveness in women’s writing is put in doubt when Sor Juana’s works are read as texts and not as products of a Baroque female’s soul. The preferred critical approach seems to be the one that does the most damage to the texts themselves by placing the life of the author above all other considerations. Sor Juana is an excellent figure with which to begin the study of the perception of women writers since she, unlike many other women writers,
is considered to be an outstanding author even when compared to men. A critic states that:

Women writers in Spain and Latin America are able to identify with Sor Juana’s intellectual obsession and suffering as well as with her vicissitudes at the hands of arrogant male critics and literary historians. Nearly three centuries after her death (in 1695), she alone among Hispanic women poets has been securely canonized in literature, that is, labeled a “great poet” and not only “the greatest woman poet.” (Miller 9)

It is because of this standing as a great poet of the era, despite her sex, that Sor Juana has garnered so much attention. Sor Juana, through her immense collection of writings and the critical treatises devoted to her, provides ample material for the study of the perception of women writers in general.

As a woman writer, Sor Juana obviously had to deal with the problematic nature of female participation in a male realm. As an author, the nun did not attempt to create a style of writing that could be described as feminine. By following the traditions of her day, Sor Juana wrote not as a woman or a man, but as a writer.\(^{10}\) This can be easily proved by pointing out the fact that Sor Juana neither emphasized nor hid her gender in any way. The world in which she lived, where the feminine was, by definition, inferior, \(^{10}\) This does not mean, however, that Sor Juana did not insert her own interests in her writings. As a critic notes: “Sor Juana conocía bien el juego y entró en él pero del seno mismo de textos sometidos a controles en el plano político y social, logró extraer conceptos personales que resolvieron las preocupaciones vitales de su existencia. La monja se propuso ganar voluntades y apasionarlas por su caso raro: una mujer sabia. En el mundo barroco novohispano de su época se ofreció a sí misma como asombro, especulación, maravilla, misterio” (Sabat Rivers Neptuno 70) ‘Sor Juana knew well the game and entered into the very heart of the texts controlled in the political and social plane. She managed to draw out personal concepts that resolved the vital preoccupations of her existence. The nun proposed herself to win wills and impassion them to support her rare cause: a learned woman. In the Hispanic colonial Baroque world of her era, she offered herself as a wonder, a speculation, a marvel, a mystery.’ In this reading, the literary traditions provided Sor Juana with the necessary tools with which she could craft a message that was most “vital” to her.
was not geared to grant a woman writer to gain respectability in any other way. As a critic states:

All of this together, added to the example of her own literary life, but substantiates the obvious: that—as is entirely natural in view of the context in which she wrote—rather than asserting or projecting women's "difference," both ideologically and literally Sor Juana sought to negate their difference, to introject or appropriate the masculine realm for the feminine and to place them on the same continuum. For Sor Juana, to write with the words of the ruling order may well have entailed claiming the woman's equal rights to write in that world; and signaled, as Virginia Woolf's notion of literary androgyny would have it, her belief that "it is fatal for one who writes to think of their sex." (Merrim Toward 22-23)

The practical aspects of Sor Juana's situation makes it illogical to assume that it would be beneficial for her to try to support a notion of sexual difference. It would have been impossible for the nun to write as a woman accepting some sort of intrinsic intellectual difference between the sexes at a time when women were considered incapable of participating in the intellectual realm. That any critic would then proceed to attempt to define her writing in any way that could be considered feminine seems inconsistent with what the nun apparently attempted to do.

A wonderful example of the approach that Sor Juana utilized toward gender is the one that she used in El Sueño. As it has been pointed out many times, this poem, the longest written by Sor Juana, only has one mention of the author's gender. This poem depicts a dream in which the soul (the human intellect) leaves the body in search of ultimate knowledge. El Sueño is considered by most to be an exemplar of Baroque thought, the masterpiece in Sor Juana's collection. More important in this study, however, is that the poem has a feminine narrator. The gender of the narrator is served
as a surprise, since it is not introduced until the last two lines of the poem. Speaking of the last two lines of the poem, a critic states:

A coda, a surprise ending, (as has been widely observed) these lines contain the poem’s first and only “yo” or “I” as well as its only first person feminine adjective, and thus indication of its female authorship. The last lines explode the poem. Do they set the feminine quest for knowledge, and perhaps, by extension, the feminine, on an equal continuum with the masculine? Or do they privilege the female, feminizing and/or personalizing the quest? The rich indeterminacy of these lines provides us with both the crux and the categories for our discussion, as we proceed to raise questions regarding Sor Juana’s relation to male literary tradition, her relation to female literary tradition, and the representation of her own personal circumstances. (Merrim Toward 21)

Written at a time when authors were presumed to be male and when the search for knowledge was assumed to be a masculine quest, the femaleness of the author and narrator are a shock to the tradition. Ignoring all of the possibilities given by Merrim above, could these two lines, the boom behind the explosion, be simply her way of flaunting her authorship in front of her male critics? If so, if the surprise ending is meant to upset the male perspective of knowledge and authorship, is it still functioning with the modern critics? By not making her gender clear until the last two lines, is Sor Juana pointing to the lack of impact that sex/gender has on intellectual aspirations? After all, does the poem remain the same, written with the same recognizable brilliance and in the same epic proportions, even if the author is female?

Another of the important questions that is raised through the study of Sor Juana is the nature of innovation. The nun, though a devoted adherent to existing literary traditions, developed her own themes and styles in her texts. Regardless of gender,
through the study of Sor Juana a way to study the nature of literary evolution in the face
of tradition can be developed. Her skill in cultivating themes and styles in order to
create her own message can shed light on how others have utilized traditional genres in
order to achieve originality. Also, Sor Juana’s texts provide an example of how an
author writing from the periphery can carve a place in the midst of the canon.

There are many difficulties surrounding the study of Sor Juana. As a writer in
the Baroque era, Sor Juana defies any simple categorization. As one critic notes:

Juana Ramirez lived at the hub of New Spain’s vice regal society, the
most splendid and complex of the Spanish colonial empire. Five vice
regal regimes succeeded each other during her lifetime. By education,
she belongs to medieval scholasticism and Renaissance humanism; in
her poetic and dramatic output to the Baroque or mannerist period; in
her intellectual orientation to the dawning of the Age of Reason. But Sor
Juana cannot be categorized because her genius and her womanhood
prevented her from becoming part of a particular school or university
tradition; the educational isolation which she at times lamented kept her
in touch with herself. (Arenal Convent 164-5)

Sor Juana belonged to many different traditions. Her ability to follow tradition made
her simultaneously simple and enigmatic. Her originality was not founded in the
creation of a new genre but in the handling of those categories already in existence. The
isolation that she suffered, a physical isolation that was in part caused by her life in the
cloister, was not a mental isolation. With a vast library, Sor Juana lived in the midst of
all the intellectual traditions available. By not participating in the intellectual circles of
Mexico, like the university, Sor Juana was free to carve out her own place in the
European traditions.
One of the most vital questions surrounding the study of the writings of Sor Juana is the role of her writing in the public sphere. The nun presents us with a prime example of how society can and does limit the author through social conventions. These conventions, as seen not just in her literary production but also in subsequent criticism, vary from gender assumptions and religious orthodoxy to class limitations and educational ceilings. What will be made clear in this study is that there are social limitations that govern the production of texts and that literature can and does serve social and diplomatic roles.

This study of Sor Juana attempts to explore three aspects of the nun’s writings: rhetoric, propriety, and tradition. These three aspects do not exist individually in Sor Juana’s writing: they intertwine and combine to form a sturdy defense for the nun’s right to write. The study of the rhetoric found in Sor Juana’s writing is of utmost importance since it allows the reader the liberty to treat the texts as calculated, and therefore, deserving of academic scrutiny. Sor Juana utilized rhetoric to manipulate the limitations that had been placed on her due to her gender and social status. This manipulation took the form of socially appropriate shows of humility and subservience.11 Sor Juana handled these rhetorical skills so efficiently and convincingly

11 Of these rhetorical tools, one critic states that: “su obra está llena de expresiones de falsa humildad como las que tenemos en este extracto [de un poema] (‘ignorante mujer,’ ‘borrones’) y que esconden en realidad el significado opuesto (la ‘ignorante mujer’ es muy consciente de su cultura)” (Wissmer 642) ‘her works are filled with expressions of false humility like the ones we have in this passage [of a poem] (‘ignorant woman,’ ‘drafts’) and these [phrases] hide reality which is the contrary (the ‘ignorant woman’ is very conscious of her culture).’ The author, in this case, needs to create an image of herself in accordance to societal norms and ignoring any considerations of truth. It needs to stated, however, that regardless of the self-image that Sor Juana crafted, she was publicly heralded for her brilliance.
that it has fooled many modern critics. As a writer, a nun, and a woman, Sor Juana had to be sure that she fulfilled all that propriety demanded of her. In her case, propriety served as the ultimate social limitation—if she did not successfully perform in this category, she would surely be banned from writing. Throughout her writing, Sor Juana defines herself both against and with tradition. It is the use of tradition that allows her to be innovative. Literary tradition provides Sor Juana the pattern for the rhetoric she uses. Also, by following set traditions, Sor Juana maintained her writings well within the limitations set by propriety.

The first chapter of this study, “The Baroque World,” will focus on the convoluted nature of the Baroque and its unfocused gaze. In this way, the subsequent chapters on Sor Juana Inés can be situated in a much broader context. The second chapter, “Rhetoric at Play: the Innocence of Literature as Work,” is a review of the diverse collection of works by Sor Juana. It provides an overview of her ability as an author as well as a scope of her interests. The professional nature of her writing, which comes vividly to life through a review of her works, informs my approach throughout the whole of this study. The third chapter, “Love Poetry: the Crafted Soul Through Lyric,” studies Sor Juana’s love poetry with an eye for rhetoric and technique. Read as an exploration of her rhetorical strategies, the nun’s love poetry serves as a perfect example of Sor Juana’s awareness of her role as an author. The fourth chapter, “Sor Juana’s Participation in the Scholastic Tradition,” shows how Sor Juana utilized the writings of the Church Fathers, especially of St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom, to justify her own position as a female author. The reliance on Scholastic Tradition provides the
nun with rational and strategic validation for her right to write. Special attention is paid
to the Respuesta a Sor Filotea in this chapter. The fifth chapter, “Hagia Sophia: the
Feminine Face of Wisdom and Virtue,” covers Sor Juana’s devotional poetry to the
Virgin Mary. It is through the figure of the Virgin Mary that the nun expands the role of
women in Western tradition. Through her devotional poetry, Sor Juana proclaims Mary
the Dean of the school of knowledge, tying education to women in a sacred manner.
The final chapter, “Speculum: Mythical Role Models,” is a study of Sor Juana’s poetry
dedicated to the wise women, mujeres sabias, of the past. Existing in a world where
Mary is the Dean, these women are the Faculty. Through the figures of these great
women of antiquity, Sor Juana creates a realm where women can, and often do, achieve
excellence.

Most of the criticism of Sor Juana suffers due to oversimplification. In the case
of Sor Juana, it is the writing style of the poet, sometimes simple and straightforward,
which has led many to see her as a simple being. As Ortega y Gasset states, “Algunos
hombres se niegan a reconocer la profundidad de algo porque exigen de lo profundo
que se manifieste como lo superficial” (Ortega y Gasset 77) ‘some men refuse to
recognize the depth of something because they demand that depth manifest itself
superficially.’ By accepting the complicated nature of Sor Juana’s writings, the move
towards a fuller understanding of her texts can be achieved. The ‘simple’ way in which
the nun wrote, after all, was nothing more than an expression of the styles in vogue at
the time. And let us be clear: the nun did not always write simply. As a renowned critic
notes: “No sólo dominó las formas sino que penetró de modo agudo en el estilo,
The importance in studying Sor Juana lies in her ability to turn the traditional into her own innovative and challenging expression.
Chapter 1. The Baroque World

To give a comprehensive definition of the Baroque period, in this study, would not be possible. However, a partial definition would help create a context in which the following study of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz would be better situated. Sor Juana was a product of her time and circumstance. This does not mean, however, that this is a study that attempts to account for, or explain, Sor Juana. This project is a study of Sor Juana’s writings as seen within the context of literary traditions and cultural standards, factors that certainly are reflected in the texts themselves. In a world in which, according to some, “the work of the human mind cannot be accounted for by any isolated process” (Kubler 82), the awareness of the coexistence of many processes, differing in every possible way, can help in reaching a more informed opinion of literary texts and other forms of artistic production.

Sor Juana is a product of her time and, therefore, it is necessary to attempt to comprehend what the Baroque world entailed. The Baroque was a period of profound evolution. The changes the world underwent in the seventeenth century, whether religious, scientific, or secular, permitted art, especially literature, to become more comprehensive in scope. The change in perception of the world forced art to evolve accordingly. This evolution was directed away from the absolutism of earlier periods and toward a complex and multiple understanding of the world.

The purpose of this chapter, however limited, is to arrive at a partial definition of Baroque which would serve as a background to the ensuing study of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and her writings. To arrive at this definition, I will study the popular critical
stances and their analytical consequences. These stances, ranging from the
psychoanalytic to the socio-historical, are essential to the comprehension of the
complex nature of the Baroque period and its artistic output. The proposed definition of
Baroque, while taking into consideration the other arts of the Baroque, will focus on
literary production and on the themes popular in the literature of the era. Because my
goal is to illuminate Sor Juana’s work, this definition will place most of the emphasis
on the role of the Counter Reformation in the creation of public works. Finally, the
works of another contemporary artist, John Donne, provides a pattern against which Sor
Juana can be compared.

Defining Baroque

The use of the word Baroque as the demarcation of an age, like any other
naming of an age in human history, is an arbitrary title, a grand generalization of a
whole time and place in human history. Unlike many of the other epochs of human
history, such as the Renaissance and the Classical age, however, the term Baroque is
not very clearly demarcated. Some state, quite clearly, that “disagreement over the
meaning of Baroque in literature began with the term itself” (Segel 15). This assertion
is usually followed by a line of investigation which includes etymological studies and
the first applications of the term, all of which seem of little consequence to this
particular study.

Of much more importance in this study is to define those aspects, factual and
stylistic, which are accepted to be true about the Baroque. There are very few features
that are widely accepted in the definition of Baroque, one of which is the years which
the era encompasses. "The chronological limits of the Baroque period," states one critic, "are roughly set from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, reaching a peak around the middle of the seventeenth" (Leonard 29). Though this is largely agreed upon, give or take fifty years on each end, it seems to be the only thing that can be stated concretely. As one critic observes, as a label Baroque is "a term that being made to mean so much means almost nothing" (Domínguez Ortiz 254). The era designated as the Baroque was one so filled with dialogue and activity that it is impossible to unify all of the cultural products under one rubric.

The attempt to do so, to create a world whose cultural products fit under the designation of Baroque, has led to much discussion. "The meaning of the word Baroque is still an open question," states a critic; "when Benedetto Croce wrote a great History of the Baroque Age, he included in the term every manifestation of seventeenth-century life, morals, religion, politics, literature, figurative art; and his judgment of them all was unfavorable" (Argan 7). Both fans and critics of the era have attempted to create a coherent notion of the artistic characteristics of the Baroque era as well as the factors that led to the rise of whatever is designated as Baroque. Of the manifestations as well as the causes, it has been stated that

The attempt to stretch it [the term Baroque] to cover the many-sided activities of a whole century has caused it to lose all precise meaning. To some critics it is the expression of courtly life; to others it is first and foremost a popular phenomenon. There are those who see it in terms of post-Tridentine religious feeling, others who maintain that it marks a secularization of life and society. At one moment we are told that it is connected with the economic depression of the period, at another that it is a culture based on ostentation and wealth. (Domínguez Ortiz 254)
Obviously, there is much room for discussion as to what the exact definition of the term is. In addition to the existing convolutions, the issue is further muddled by its application to literature as well as other arts.

It is important to note that the term was not initially designed to be applied to literature; the term was created to deal with the visual arts: painting, architecture, and sculpture. The usage of the word when referring to literature, therefore, ranks as a misnomer in which much incongruity exists due to the borrowed and arbitrary nature of the designation. The original characteristics the term was meant to describe, those of a visual type, were grafted onto literature with conflictive results. This confusion is widely noted by many literary, cultural, and art critics. One critic states of this inter-medium obfuscation that

The term “Baroque” has been used in many different senses during the last hundred years, and has been applied not only to the visual arts, but to literature and music. There has, in fact, been much confusion in the use of the word, partly because in these fields it has often been applied to styles that do not correspond to what is meant by Baroque in the visual arts. In literature, for instance, many works are called Baroque which the art historian might prefer to call Mannerist. (Blunt 3)

What is true for the visual arts, therefore, is not necessarily translated directly into literature. The qualities designated as Baroque, which would then comprise a definition of Baroque, are lacking any clear and obvious delineation.

The term, lacking a definitive identity, has come to mean a variety of things. One of the easiest and most practical ways to define the Baroque period is by denying the epoch an exclusive nature: since all specific, characteristic-based definitions would deny the participation of at least some percentage of cultural products, it is best, and...
most respectful of the diverse era, to define Baroque as all that was produced at that time. This approach is shared by Germain Bazin as he defines the term to be an all-encompassing category. Bazin makes this clear when he states that “the period of art which is the subject of this book extends from the decline of Roman mannerism to the rise of neoclassicism—a period of about two centuries, from 1580 to 1780. The title *The Baroque* in this context embraces the whole range of artistic expression which evolved within Western civilization in the course of these two centuries” (14). It is clear to see that in such a broad definition, where a word is to describe all forms of expressions in a two-century span of time, the word *Baroque* is to be used more as a general category and not as a distinct adjective.

Nevertheless, there is a need to talk of the trends that governed the era and their impact on individual artists. This compels some critics to adopt a different view toward the meaning of the word *Baroque*. Because the term needs to have limitations if it is to serve a purpose in the study of the era, many critics attempt to limit the word’s significance to what is considered to be the most popular or the most notable aspects of that time. As one critic utilizes the term, “the word ‘Baroque’, as I shall use it in this book, denotes, first of all, the predominant artistic trends of the period that is roughly comprehended by the seventeenth century. It is important to note at the outset that this is only a convenient approximation; for the epoch as a whole can certainly not be fitted into such a strait-jacket” (Martin 12). The realization that by narrowing the definition one gains in convenience but sacrifices through simplification of the subject matter is necessary if there is to be a realistic application of the term.
Indeed, the use of a narrowed definition is seen negatively by some critics who warn against the neglect of those artistic products that do not comply with an arbitrarily manufactured definition of Baroque. George Kubler in his book *The Shape of Time* states that, “in effect, to speak of Baroque art keeps us from noting either the divergent examples or the rival systems of formal order in the seventeenth century. We have become reluctant to consider the alternatives to Baroque art in most regions, or to treat the many gradations between metropolitan and provincial expressions of the same forms” (128). This warning is of special interest in inter-cultural studies where artistic production emerges from diverse cultural backgrounds. Art from different contexts, whether cultural or economical, will naturally differ in characteristics and possibly not share the dominant features that “define” a style in the assigned cultural center. The process of defining what is Baroque, and hence, what is not Baroque, may hinder the study of artistic production from the periphery, since usually movements are defined by the standards set in cultural centers.¹ Also, it is necessary to note that the gradations that Kubler mentioned, found between the art produced in the center and the art produced in the periphery, may also be found within the works of a single author.²

¹ This is of special interest in this particular study since the author in question, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, was not only writing from the cultural periphery, a colony in the New World, but was also peripheral in identity: a woman of non-noble lineage, illegitimate in birth, and a nun.

² An example of an author straddling the line between two literary classifications is Cervantes, of whom it is stated that “the work of Cervantes, like that of Goethe, falls between two centuries and two styles. The sixteenth-century heritage is evident in the Italianate classicism, the traces of an almost forgotten Erasmism, the polished and unaffected prose. In fact almost the whole of his output belongs to this century; but *Don Quixote* is already Baroque” (Dominguez Ortiz 253). The parameters of the Baroque, as shown by one of the greatest authors in Spanish literature, are not set in stone.
The problematic nature of the term "Baroque" is in part due to its descriptive value when referring to both a style and a period. Because critics tend to speak of a Baroque style, a style which is independent of the period with which it is generally associated, there is a lack of cohesion between content and chronology. As Americo Castro sums it up:

Few problems present so confused and complicated an aspect. The term baroque is far from having a definite significance; the period to which it refers has no strictly defined limits; there are works that for some historians are baroque and for others are not; some say that the baroque is a post-Renaissance phenomenon, although it is spoken of at times as if it had been present before that period, and even in antiquity. (223)

Baroque, then, is not limited to that which some like to call the early modern period. There are classical works which are, by some, considered baroque in nature. This, of course, makes it all the more impossible to create a clear definition of Baroque.

Before studying the mysterious essence of the Baroque any further, it is important to acknowledge the negative view that some critics have of the most original and widely accepted aspects of the period. Due to the highly ornate nature of Baroque artistic production, some critics tend to view the period as a perversion of the previously existing trends. The critic, when attempting to study and give significance to the Baroque, finds it necessary to make endorsing statements such as: ‘el Barroco no es una degeneración, sino un cambio violento de las formas del estilo renacentista’ (Orozco Díaz 24) ‘the Baroque isn’t a degeneration, instead, it is a violent change in the forms of Renaissance styles.’ Often maligned in the realm of criticism, the study of the Baroque has focused on the incomprehensible and extreme nature of the art generally
attributed to be deserving of the title. Indeed, some of the criticism has been so negative and dismissive that Americo Castro has found it necessary to remind the critic that the critical work should attempt to be free of prejudice. Castro informs the critic that it is imperative to study the object of attention as objectively as possible. Modern aesthetics and styles provide prejudices which modern readers must take into consideration when valorizing the work of another period. Castro points to the fact that all who perceive (which includes reading) do so from their personalized, individualized world view.  

The reigning tradition in modern criticism has perceived the Baroque as a mainly spiritual movement. The artistic tendencies, following this reading, are products of the spiritual state of the artist. The Baroque, then, is to be seen not as a state of mind but of spirit. A critic insinuates this by stating that “el barroco es, tanto como una técnica, un estado de espíritu. Esta afirmación no encierra novedad alguna porque ha podido ser intuida a través de eruditos y tratadistas” (Díaz-Plaja 9) ‘the baroque is, as much as a technique, a state of the soul. This affirmation is no novelty in and of itself, as it has been discerned through the learned and the essayists.’ The assumed soul-searching that has often been a subject of the arts in this period, therefore, is now turned into the motivational force for the art. By stating that this observation is not new, the

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3 Castro goes on to show some skepticism over whether the awareness of these prejudices would reduce the amount of subjectivity with which studies are carried out. While warning against the tyrannical nature of the centrality of personal cosmology, he gives little direction in how to escape this inevitable trap. Accepting the futility of attempting complete objectivity, he states that the facts “in themselves . . . warn the historian against positive or negative prejudice. In order to concentrate honestly upon so entangled a matter, he must be as objective as possible. Perhaps he should be a citizen of the North Pole, the priest of some stellar cult” (Castro 224).
critic demarcates the tradition in which he writes. This clarifies that this perspective of
the Baroque, as an artistic movement defined by the emotions of the artist, permeates
existing criticism.

The study of the period as a phenomenon of form and style, the sub-
categorization of the whole into clear and definable sub-components, is insufficient to
some. There is a desire to find an informing central aesthetic to the entirety of artistic
production. This desire to unify and therefore simplify the period focuses on the
creation of a singular motivation for all of the different types of expression. This
attempt to define the core is best seen in the following quotation:

Warnke states at one point that “the study of seventeenth-century
literature has supplied us with a wealth of limited terms which, taken
together, make up the Baroque: e.g. Metaphysical style, préciosité,
marinismo, conceptismo, culturanismo.” I agree that these terms
designate techniques of verbal art cultivated in different countries during
the Baroque and, in turn, together make up the Baroque and distinguish
it from the Renaissance and classicism. But I am also of the opinion, and
here I believe that I go farther than Warnke, that Metaphysical,
préciosité, and so on, ultimately derive from the underlying sensibility of
the Baroque and can be viewed more or less as local variants of the same
basic aesthetic. (Segel 22)

Obviously, the studies of the forms and techniques that make up the Baroque period are
not enough for some. There is a driving and compelling force to unearth the motivation
behind the technique: to unveil the muse that whispered into the artist’s ear. In this
movement to find the informing truth behind the art, all of the artistic products of the
Baroque become confessional in nature. Art becomes the mirror of the soul as the
Baroque becomes the expression not of skill but of spirit.
The emphasis on Baroque style as an expression of the spirit is accented by the perception of Baroque philosophy as a rebellion countering the coherence provided by Renaissance philosophy and art. By defining Baroque against the Renaissance, the critic can then define Baroque style according to how it breaks with tradition, which is a much easier task. The ways in which the artistic expressions of the Baroque differ from the preceding era display to some critics the spiritual crisis that is seen as dominating the whole of the artistic output of the era in question. It is said that “se ve en el Barroco no sólo una particular actitud plástica característica del siglo XVII en Europa y en América; fue, además dirigiendo aquélla, una manifestación espiritual, una crisis interior que sucedió y se opuso a otra: la renacentista” (Carilla Gongorismo 15) ‘in the Baroque is seen not only a particular plastic attitude characteristic of the XVII century in Europe and America, but also, directing this attitude, a spiritual manifestation, an interior crisis that developed and opposed itself to another: the Renaissance.’ The view that the Baroque era is, in short, a spiritual crisis and its products is affirmed by stating that this particular spiritual crisis, the Baroque, is a response to another spiritual crisis, the Renaissance. The Baroque period as defined by its artistic production, then, is an active dismantling of the unified world view produced through the art of the Renaissance. The emphasis on contradictions, the attention paid to details that may or may not add to a unifying figure, all are based on the spiritual need to see the world as complex and cumulative.

The aggregate nature of the Baroque, then, the lack of focus or center that is often seen in the art produced at the time, is explained as a negation of the
comprehensively encompassing view created in the Renaissance. This type of criticism is applied to all the arts of the Baroque. The different media prevalent in the Baroque era, architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature, are all seen as forms of expression of the same tortured soul. In comparing the literature of the era with the visual forms of artistic expression which first earned the name baroque, a critic states:

La literatura barroca, correspondiendo a un mismo espíritu, tiene, por lo tanto, manifestaciones semejantes. El verso y la prosa interrumpen su correr transparente, pero ya cansado; el verso llena su ritmo natural con extraordinario acopio de elementos ornamentales, y la armonía clásica se corta bruscamente en la poesía barroca. El artificio técnico, el trabajo del detalle, pasan al primer plano a veces en perjuicio del asunto o argumento. (Carilla *Gongorismo* 16-7)

Baroque literature, in as much as it conforms to the same spirit, has similar manifestations. Verse and prose interrupt their transparent, yet tired, path; verse fills its natural rhythm with an extraordinary accumulation of ornamental elements, and classical harmony is abruptly curtailed in Baroque poetry. The technical artifices, the toil of detail, move to the forefront, sometimes at the expense of the subject or argument.

All of this points to the view that the works of the Baroque are perceived as works that focus more on the technique of the medium, and not on the message or moral of the work. Simultaneously, however, the works are viewed as works of the spirit in crisis, as works that depict a transition between world views. According to this opinion, as in the visual arts, literature offers the critic a realm in which to study the complex interplay between technique and the soul: the troubled soul, a product of the spiritual crisis of the era, displays its confusion by subverting meaning and focusing on technique. The artistic products of the era, therefore, show the personal crisis of the artist through their technique-driven styles.
Given this conviction, where the artistic product of the Baroque age is perceived to be the expression of a soul in crisis as caused by the spiritual confusion of the time, many critics have relied upon psychoanalytic methods in order to study what they perceive to be more important than the works: the motivating force behind them. The view of what is considered the superficial, stylistic concerns, is illuminated by the view of what is seen as depth, the assumed motivation behind the creation of the piece. This approach is helpful since it is a method of studying literature that links literature with the visual arts of the day. However, this method achieves this unison between the artistic media by simplifying all artistic productions to be primarily an expression of the artist, with the assumption that all artists reacted in the same way to cultural changes. If one takes this assumption as basis, as one critic notes, the move toward psychoanalysis as the preferred method of study for art from the Baroque is not strange. He states,

No es extraño, así, que el movimiento de revalorización y comprensión del estilo Barroco se desarrollara siguiendo el mismo paso de lo estilístico formal a lo interno, vital y psicológico. Primero se analiza y caracteriza su morfología, se fijan las categorías o símbolos de la visión, los conceptos fundamentales wolfflinianos que establecen su contraposición con lo clásico; después--todavía--se ahonda en la psicología del estilo, se busca su espíritu. Y no es extraño tampoco que en esta progresiva comprensión del Barroco se partiera de las artes plásticas y se trasladara después la atención al campo de la poesía y de la música. El porqué de esto último, y que luego veremos, es bien claro: es lo visual y pictórico lo que preside el desarrollo y vida de las formas en el Barroco. (Orozco Díaz 22-3)

It is not strange, then, that the movement to re-value and comprehend the Baroque style developed following the same path from formal stylistic concerns to internal, vital, and psychological concerns. First, its morphology is analyzed and characterized, the categories or symbols of vision are defined, Wölfflin’s fundamental concepts that establish its counter-stance to the classical. Afterwards—still—the psychology of style
is sounded: its spirit is searched. And it is not strange, either, that this progressive comprehension of the Baroque would have its origins in the plastic arts and would later shift its attention to the fields of poetry and music. The reason for this last phenomenon, which we will soon see, is very clear: it is the visual and the pictorial that precedes the development and the life of the forms of the Baroque.

By utilizing the idea that the literature and the music of the era developed using the same basic concepts found in the visual arts, the literature of the Baroque can be tied to the other arts of the period with the whole being considered expressions of angst-ridden souls. The Baroque becomes comprehensible through the study of the human psyche.

Problematic in this psychoanalytic strain of criticism is the diminution of importance of stylistic concerns. Style and form no longer are the focus of studies, they are viewed as objects to be analyzed, categorized, and then put away as the study moves away from the “formal stylistic [concerns] to the internal, vital, and psychological [concerns].” With this movement, the critic moves away from any hope of an objective study, would an objective study be possible at all, to an account based on suppositions, assumptions, and prejudices. The importance is taken away from the stylistic concerns of the works as importance is being given to the assumed motivations, and/or compulsions, of the artist in the production of the work. The emphasis is moved away from the concrete work that can be seen to an assumed nebulous, undefinable spirit that moves the artist to create the work. This is clearly the aim of many critics, to provide a narrative that explains the works through assumptions made of the artists. The final result of this movement is to create a system of artistic analysis where the importance of the work lies in the possible interpretations that they allow of the artists and not of
the art itself. As one critic notes, “al tratar del concepto del Barroco en el campo literario, lo realmente importante no es el estilo, sino discriminar un estado de espíritu, esto es, encontrar la expresión de un «alma barroca»” (Orozco Díaz 29-30) ‘in dealing with the concept of the Baroque in the literary field, the really important thing is not the style, but instead to discern a spiritual state, that is, to find the expression of a “Baroque soul.”’ The object of study, for many, has been essentialist in nature: the search for the essence, found in the soul, that informed the art of the Baroque.

However, in some cases, the Baroque soul points the critic to the more concrete factors of the period, like the religious and secular revolutions of the seventeenth century. Directing its attention to the Counter Reformation, the Baroque soul is then no longer to be considered as tied to a genre so much as to the motivation behind the creation of art. The Baroque spirit, then, is that which allowed the artist to participate in the religious discussions of the time on behalf of the Catholic Counter Reformation. States a critic, “el espíritu barroco se caracterizó, no menos, por poner el arte al servicio de la religión, y en forma tal que contribuye a fijar uno de los rasgos de la época” (Carilla Hispánico 157) ‘the Baroque spirit characterizes itself, no less, in placing art at the service of religion, and in such a way that it contributes in defining one of the aspects of the epoch.’ The spirit of the Baroque, that motivating factor in the creation of artistic works, is in some critical texts, the most important aspect of study of the Baroque. Whether linked to psychoanalytic concerns or cultural revolutions, like the Reformation/Counter Reformation, the Baroque soul may be more undefinable than the Baroque style. Nevertheless, impossibly, in this line of analysis, the soul becomes more
discernible than the text as both become objects to be deciphered. The Counter
Reformation and its impact on art will be further studied in this chapter.

The transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque period develops at the same
time, and possibly because of the radical changes that were occurring in the world in
general. The advent of science, in its modern definition, helped create a new role for
human beings. The secularization of knowledge, the move toward an understanding of
the cosmos without the presence of the divine, unsettled the position of mankind in the
traditional schema of the universe. As one critic observes:

The most portentous discovery of the moment was a new approach to
truth destined to transform the western world, and, in time, the entire
globe. This was modern science. The Ptolemaic universe, with the earth
its center and pivotal point, was yielding, still imperceptibly perhaps and
quite precariously as Galileo was experiencing, to the Copernican
universe with the earth a mere peripheral planet of an immense solar
system. A newer freedom of speculation and experimentalism was
undermining the traditional verbalistic methods of scholasticism, and it
would lead to discoveries dwarfing the miracles of medieval lore.
(Leonard 22)

The change in understanding of the physical world for the Baroque individual
complicated and challenged the traditional perception of the self and of the community
as well as added to the existing theological questions of the era. The change in the
nature of science, the move toward a secular truth, created a different role for literature
and the arts. As one critic explains, “the more science declared that its aim (not its
principle) was truth, the more art became aware that its only possible aim was fiction.

But may one speak of fiction, and condemn it as morally negative, if there is no
ascertainable truth?” (Argan 9). Art, just like man, had to redefine its purpose and position in a world in flux.

Of all the changes the European world underwent at that time, however, the most pertinent to our study is that of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. "At the origin of the radical transformation which the relations of man and the universe underwent in the seventeenth century," states one critic, "we must mention the religious crisis of the sixteenth century, no less important in this respect than the Cartesian revolution or, in the scientific domain, the appearance of Copernicus and Galileo" (Argan 8). This religious debate, alongside the scientific revolution, created a change in world view: a change in the way people perceived their role in the universe and their relationship to the physical and spiritual world surrounding them. The environment of the Baroque was one of fast occurring change in all imaginable realms of society. The world, both spiritually (through religion) and physically (through science and the discovery of new lands), kept changing at a pace that made the position of the human being uncertain. As stated by a critic,

The seventeenth century has a Janus-like aspect: an age of extraordinary advances in philosophy and science, and of sweeping changes in the economic sphere and in the development of the modern state: but an age characterized also by continuing theological controversy, by an intense concern for the personal religious experience and by a spirit of providentialism inherited from earlier Christianity. (Martin 12)

The world was in flux. The individual had to be redefined politically, socially, theologically, and scientifically. The forward, somewhat headlong evolution of society
demanded the balancing force of tradition to aid in the adjustment to this new situation. The battle between change and stability raged on in everyday life and its depictions.

Indeed, it has been a tradition of sorts to see the Baroque, however it is defined, as a result of the religious upheaval of the times. As one critic clearly states, “in the realm of religious history, the momentous events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, of course, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. For many students it is these events, above all, that stand behind the emergence of developments in the arts summed up in the term Baroque” (Segel 33). The religious revolution has to be seen as a strong factor in the art of the time as it pervaded all levels of society, private and public.

**Counter Reformation**

The argument is made that the Baroque, in some cases, can be seen as the artistic branch of the Counter Reformation. The Reformation and the Counter Reformation had an incredible impact on the art that was produced at the time. Under a state of constant evolution was not only the role of the human being in the cosmos, but, also, in the midst of all the religious conflicts, this public preoccupation with the new and emerging role of mankind in the cosmos resulted in a rise in works dealing with the subject. Art became a site for meditation over the place of mankind. The questions facing all of society played out in the public realm of art, as stated,
católica, período de crisis y de angustia, tenía que manifestarse en otras formas del espíritu, y así, en el arte, se personaliza en el Barroco. (Carilla Gongorismo 15-6)

Chronologically, the Baroque style can be enclosed into the XVIIth century—with the imprecision of cultural centuries—, and represents, for Weisbach, the artistic aspiration of “the Counter Reformation and Absolutism.” Especially of the Counter Reformation, and in this aspect: the synthesis of emotions and religious conflicts. The era of the great Catholic reaction, a period of crisis and anguish, it had to manifest itself in other forms of the spirit, and thus, in art, it manifests itself in the Baroque.

The perceived spiritual crisis of the era can be attributed to the changing face of religion. The religious challenges created by the Reformation, alongside the ensuing reaffirmation of the Counter Reformation, created a tenuous position for all of the individuals inhabiting a world where all forms of expressions addressed the basic issues at question and, because of this, were under close scrutiny by the powers that be.

In the Counter Reformation, art was a public forum dealing with the new position of mankind in the universe. The Catholic Church sanctioned and recompensed works that made the ‘correct’ conclusions about the nature of humanity. The Catholic Church, especially the Inquisition, was also wary of any work that did not meet the required theological precepts. Art, in the Counter Reformation, held a prominent position: through art, from music to architecture, the doctrines of the Catholic Church were supported and illustrated. Depicting art as a force utilized by the Catholic Church against the Protestant movement, a critic states:

The defense and revaluation of images was the great undertaking of the Baroque age; it started when the Church, now convinced that it had contained the Protestant attack, passed to the counter-offensive. In the face of the iconoclast Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church
reaffirmed the ideal value and practical necessity of visible demonstrations, as an edifying example, from the events of her own history. The Church reaffirmed again the validity of classical culture and of that of the Renaissance because, if what is beautiful gives pleasure, it can serve as a means of persuasion. It encouraged the most spectacular forms of art, just as it accentuated the spectacular character of religious worship and ritual. (Argan 17)

Art played a large role in the religious conflicts. The techniques in use, the propensity for depicting conflicts and extremes, can be explained by the participation of the arts in the resolution of the religious crisis of the times. Designed to educate as well as please, art works no longer simply followed the rules of aesthetics; the works were meant to also follow and illustrate the dogma of the Church.4

Art, it seems, became the public relations arm of the Catholic Church. By definition, art is made to appeal to the masses. This public appeal was then utilized to promote the teachings of the Church in a more inviting manner. The Catholic Church, from the pulpit, endeavored to maintain and convert as many souls as possible to their brand of Christianity through direct instruction. Art, as a partner in this religious movement, was then meant to influence individuals through the senses. As one critic states:

[the] perception of the greater reality of heaven leads us to the second major factor influencing the Spanish Baroque, the impact on society of the Catholic Reformation. After the spread of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church decided to seize the initiative in a

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4 This same conclusion is reached by other critics. One states that "hecha la aclaración, es indudable que el barroco nos convence como una manifestación particularmente cristiana. Mejor dicho, católica, y, con más exactitud, al servicio de ideales de la Contrarreforma" (Carilla Hispánico 157-8) "this clarification made, it is indubitable that the Baroque convinces us it is a manifestation that is particularly Christian. Better said, Catholic, and, with much more exactness, at the service of the ideals of the Counter Reformation."
counter-offensive intended to win back the hearts and minds of individuals to Catholicism. (Robbins 20)

Serving as a seventeenth-century ad campaign, the art of the era reflected upon the religious doubts of the population and gave a dogmatic reading of the situation. Obviously, not all art participated in this religious propaganda; there was always present a substantial amount of secular art that dealt with classical or social themes without touching upon the religious.

There was, however, an increase in religious works with the emphasis falling on Catholic dogma that was disputed by the Protestants. By focusing on religious aspects that were uniquely Catholic, art strengthened its stand as a public voice, as a method in which the artists could participate in the public discourse of the day. As a critic explains:

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In a cyclical manner, art attempted to influence the religious discourse of the time while being fundamentally influenced by the spiritual crisis. As one critic notes, "from this point of view, we may say that Baroque art is the great technical contribution to the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic solution to the concrete problem of human enterprise. If we agree with the principle of salvation by works, and concede the finalistic and soteriological character of human action, technique must be 'creative'; that is, it must continue in society the work of creation whose principle and pattern were laid down by God in nature. In so far as it is imagination, art is the natural way in which man may act; the more so because science, developing now on lines independent of religious dogma, and of philosophical speculation, worked out an applied technique which, being an epiphenomenon, cannot be strictly finalistic or soteriological" (Argan 118).

While art in the Baroque was a way to publicly participate in the important debates of the day, art itself was irreversibly changed through the process as the meaning and motivation behind art gained a spiritual, and yet political, aspect.

The holiness of the mother of God was one of those themes that was under contention. Many artists of the time chose to work with the figure of Virgin Mary since the Protestant faith had demoted her in sanctity. As Spear notes: "the real Marian defense began in earnest with publication of the Jesuit Peter Canisius' polemical De Maria virgine incomparabili in 1577. Canisius' lengthy treatise, which has been called 'the first important Mariological work after the Reformation in defense of the Catholic veneration of the Mother of God,' rejects the Lutheran view that Mary was of lowly origins and tied to household duties in favor of her supreme dignity and position as the Second Eve. Canisius loved Mary, implored her to count him among 'thy little clients and servants,' and insisted on Mary's Immaculate Conception, perpetual virginity and divine motherhood. He provided justification for the Salve Regina, Ave Maria and title Mediatrix of All Graces, and defended using the language of love in calling Mary sweetness, joy, hope, and so forth" (Spear 135). As will become clear in the chapter on Mary, Sor Juana joins in the melee in a rather unique way.
Devotional art and literature increased greatly over this period as a consequence, and artistic subjects were often chosen so as to affirm the centrality of distinctive features of Catholicism criticised and rejected by Protestants: the monastic orders, the virgin Mary, transubstantiation (the belief that the consecrated bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ), and the martyrdom of Saints whose deaths were conceived as an example to the faithful and a reaffirmation of the true Church’s history. (Robbins 21)

Themes, then, were chosen due to their applicability to the discussions at the time. It is important to note that many artists worked on commission basis, painting, building, and writing on the behest of patrons on whatever topic they desired. There seems to be no edict, religious or secular, demanding artists to create works that dealt specifically with the themes mentioned above. The interest in the hotly debated issues of the day, however, seems to be widespread as ascertained by the number of works dedicated to these themes.

For some critics, the finest artists of the time all immersed themselves in the religious discourse of the time. One critic goes as far as to say that a sign of greatness for a Baroque artist is the active participation in devotional art. He states, “el espíritu barroco, o, mejor, grandes escritores barrocos, ven en las letras el vehículo por excelencia de la fe y la propaganda” (Carilla *Hispánico* 161) ‘the Baroque spirit, or, better yet, the great Baroque writers, see in letters the vehicle par excellence of faith and propaganda.’ The artist’s willingness to participate in the religious zeal of the day, according to this statement, is never doubted for it is the path to greatness.
The presence of the divine in the works of art of the era, therefore, was always a political and theological statement. In the midst of all of the religious debate, the role of mankind in this world is being redefined not only by the creation and affirmation of religious dogma, but also by the new scientific discoveries of the day. As the focus of the world becomes the afterlife, salvation takes the forefront in everyday concerns: the physical world loses importance and the attention shifts to the eternal. The newly placed emphasis on salvation by works created a new role for human beings in this world. “All interest is now concentrated on the problem of human existence, its end and its destiny,” states a critic; “for if salvation by grace is hazardous, salvation by works has no less its problems and its difficulties” (Argan 8). The religious crisis made theology an everyday issue: the divine had a prominent place in the mundane.

After clarifying that the Baroque era is intrinsically tied to the Counter Reformation, it is necessary to state that the complex nature of the Baroque makes it impossible to state that it sprouted only from the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. Studying the aesthetic qualities of the era is difficult due to the lack of an absolute definition for the term “Baroque.” It is interesting to note that Baroque aesthetics, as ambiguous as it may be, has gained a negative perception on some critical

7 In fact, some define Baroque as a direct emanation from the sublime. In this way, the term baroque is once again stretched to mean something else: any period which is characterized by being a direct radiation from a divine source. This can well be seen in the following summary of a work that utilizes this variation in defining Baroque. It is stated that: “In essays written between the two world wars, Eugenio d’Ors discussed the philosophy and aesthetics of the baroque, seeing it as an aeon, a term used in Gnostic philosophy to denote the emanations or aspects through which the Supreme Being acts upon the world. Not without humour, he outlines the taxonomy of the baroque; in the genus Barocchus he distinguishes twenty species, the newest of which are fin de siècle baroque (B. finesecularis) and post-war baroque (B. posteabellicus)” (Bazin 17). Obviously, baroque is no longer held to signify only the works from the seventeenth century. Baroque style, through this definition, becomes the genre of the divine.
fronts. As one critic notes, “In the case of the baroque it is typical that what is beauty
for one person is monstrosity and corruption for another” (Castro 223). Due to the
ornate nature of the styles utilized in the Baroque and, in great part, also due to the
temporal appeal of this ornateness, some critics have viewed the Baroque as a
degeneration of the more simple and straightforward approach of the Renaissance. The
opinion that Baroque aesthetic is a degeneration and, therefore, an artistic aberration
makes it necessary to take precautions against these prejudices in order to make an
honest attempt at studying the Baroque without discarding it in the process. Regardless
of the negative opinions, the study of the aesthetics of the era can serve as a way to
simultaneously study many of the conflicting factors that contribute to Baroque art. As
one critic notes,

Utilizada como punto de confluencia, espacio conceptual, la estética nos
permite una reflexión conjunta sobre los significados literarios e
históricos. A fin de aclarar esta proposición, tomemos como ejemplo la
estética barroca. No resulta fácil caracterizarla, especialmente si la
demarcación no es cronológica o, aun, resultante de determinadas
circunstancias históricas como Contrarreforma o crisis de los Estados
 europeos, por ejemplo. (Theodora da Silva 88)

Utilized as a point of junction, a conceptual space, aesthetics allows us
to reflect collectively over the literary and historical significance. In
order to clarify this proposition, let us take as an example the Baroque
aesthetics. It does not turn out to be easy to characterize it, especially
when the demarcation is not chronological or, even, resulting from a
determined historical circumstance such as the Counter Reformation or
the crisis of the European states, for example.

The aesthetics of the Baroque, necessarily, are derived from the historical and cultural
events of the time as well as the traditions already present. The aesthetic standards
followed in the many artistic modes of the Baroque reflect the intricate web of factors
that influence the art of the period. Of special interest in this study, however, are the aesthetic standards of the literature of the time and, especially, from Spain and its colonies.

**Stylistic Concerns**

Stylistically, there are many different aspects which some feel are necessary components of Baroque literature and its aesthetic. Focusing on Baroque literature as produced by the writers following Petrarchan traditions, the features that mark a work as Baroque seem to be best described by the following:

 Yo veo los caracteres esenciales del arte barroco (y, sobre todo, del barroco literario hispánico) en los siguientes aspectos:
  1) La contención (y alarde dentro de la contención).
  2) La oposición y la antítesis.
  3) Lo embellecido (más que lo bello), y, como forma particular, la tendencia a la fusión o aproximación de diferentes artes.
  4) Individualización de lo feo y lo grotesco.
  5) El desengaño (dentro de límites humanos) y la trascendencia de ideales religiosos. (Carilla *Hispanoamérica* 18)

I see the essential characters of Baroque art (and, above all, of the Hispanic literary Baroque) in the following aspects:

  1) Contention (and ostentation within contention).
  2) Opposition and antithesis.
  3) The embellished (more than the beautiful), and, as a particular form, the tendency to fuse or juxtapose different arts.
  4) The individualization of the ugly and the grotesque.
  5) The *desengaño* [disillusionment] (within the limitations of human beings) and the transcendence of religious ideals.

These essential characteristics, though not the only ones attributed to the artistic works produced in that era, point to the importance of conflict and disillusionment within the works.
In the discussion of the aesthetic concerns of the era, it has to be made clear that much of the criticism sees aesthetic considerations and stylistic aspects as nothing more than another manifestation of the Baroque soul. According to some, Baroque, seen as a disintegration of taste by some critics, is truly caused by the psychic forces that were detailed earlier. The more concrete socio-historical considerations are all of lesser importance, according to some critics, than the crisis of spirit that leads to the Baroque.

As one critic expounds, "las razones políticas, culturales y sociales, aducidas generalmente por los historiadores, necesitan un punto de partida más hondo, genuino y unificador. Toda decadencia, en el espíritu se origina y a él afecta de manera esencial. En él hay que buscarla. La historia de la nuestra, y quizá de toda decadencia, es la historia del sentimiento del desengaño" (Rosales 65) 'the political, cultural, and social reasons, as generally justified by the historians, need a deeper, more genuine and unifying starting point. All decadence begins in the soul and affects the soul in an essential manner. In it [the soul] one has to search. The history of our decadence, and maybe of all decadence, is the history of the emotion of the desengaño.'

The disillusionment, or desengaño, that takes center stage for many of the literary genres in the Baroque, in some critical stances, is the necessary element in all of the artistic production of the time.

The theme of the desengaño was one that had much attention paid to it by the artists of the era. As one critic states, "el desengaño fue sentimiento que tuvo en las letras españolas del siglo XVII singular expansión" (Carilla Hispanoamérica 25) 'in Spanish literature of the XVII century, desengaño was a feeling that had a most singular
exploration.' The *desengaño* becomes a thematic element that is found in works dealing with all subjects including, and especially, love, religion, and honor. The notions that crowded around these subjects, created and cultivated under previous literary traditions, were slowly and steadily deconstructed by the growing disillusionment in the newer works. The old codes around which the world had been constructed were losing their totality. In a world where the role and purpose of the human being was increasingly questioned, these codes were simultaneously desirable for the structural stability they provided and impossible to believe in a world where the cosmology was so radically different. As one critic notes, "el sentimiento del desengaño llenó casi completamente el ámbito del nuevo siglo. Instituciones, formas de vida, costumbres y temas literarios lo reflejan de manera inequívoca. El sentimiento religioso, el sentimiento del amor, el sentimiento del honor se hacen más rigidos y al mismo tiempo se van tiñendo de escepticismo" (Rosales 65) 'the feeling of disillusionment filled almost completely the environment of the new century. Institutions, ways of life, traditions, and literary themes all reflect this in an undeniable way. The religious sentiment, the sentiment of love, and the sentiment of honor became more rigid at the same time that they were being stained by skepticism.' The traditional codes which governed everyday life were now being doubted and a process of reformulation began in the attempt to fit human conduct in the new world of the Baroque period.

Another direction for the aesthetic evolution in Spanish literature was toward ambiguity. Literary style became a tool that did not necessarily lead the reader to a clear understanding of the text. Parting from the Renaissance traditions, some critics believe
that the literary tradition breaks into two different paths, the highbrow and the vernacular. This is held to be true particularly in poetry. "Poetry," it is stated, "undergoes a major transformation: the earlier balance is upset and two currents emerge, one popular and the other refined" (Dominguez Ortiz 254). Although the argument can be made that literary production has always been geared to both of these two camps, the Baroque brought about a style of poetry so entangled in learnedness that it does not fail to astound readers today. As one critic states, "the clarity of the humanist surrendered to the Baroque pursuit of the less clear and the opaque, and the aesthetic techniques of culteranismo and conceptismo facilitated the desired obscurity of expression" (Leonard 31). To understand both culteranismo, utilizing the figures of classical myth, and conceptismo, using conceits and symbols, the readers were required to have high levels of education in the literary and classical traditions.

The use of images to relay meaning had been in practice long before the Baroque. The Renaissance had yielded an artistic tradition strong in its use of the imagery and symbolism as found in literature and in the visual arts. As one scholar notes, "the second variety of Renaissance public art was literary, in particular emblem books and poems of praise" (Carrithers 47). The emblem books of the Renaissance direct the attention to the links of painting and other visual arts to literature. Simply stated, "las relaciones entre la poesía y la pintura son grandes" (Arenas 175) 'the connections between poetry and painting are great.' This intertwining of painting and poetry is by no means original to the Baroque period. As one critic summarizes,
Four centuries before the *ut pictura poesis* of Horace, Simonides is reputed to have said painting is silent poetry and poetry, speaking painting. The durability of the precept is measured by echoes to be found in the words of Leonardo da Vinci in the fifteenth century and of e. e. cummings in the twentieth. Leonardo wrote, "Painting is a poetry that is seen and not heard and poetry is a painting which is heard and not seen." (Rogers 41-42)

Clearly imbedded in the artistic consciousness of the West, the relationship between word and image is found to be a strong one. A traditional view of poetry and painting, as it descends from Classical thought, this perception of the affiliation between the visual and the textual takes on a new guise.8

The path through which the use of the image reaches the Baroque imagination from the Classical period can be seen as running through Petrarch as well as the popular emblems of the Renaissance. As Mario Praz states, "one can safely assume that Petrarch was a forerunner of the Seicento not only because of his taste for conceits but also because of his emblematic bias. But emblems and conceits are fruits of the same tree, and the periods which were fond of conceits were also periods of emblems" (14). The links between the visual and literary arts thicken with the realization that the process that leads to the use of imagery in the Baroque is very long and complicated.9

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8 For some critics, the connection between poetry and painting is best represented by the emblem book. This can be seen in the following statement: "Surprisingly numerous are the essays dealing with the emblematic imagery of poets who lived from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries. Most critics have been interested to a greater or lesser extent in using the emblem-books as sources or parallels for such imagery" (Daly 55). The emblem book seems to serve the purpose of a handbook telling the modern reader the significance of the images utilized in poetry and painting.

9 Though the use of the image is clearly a stage in the evolution within the literary culture of Europe, according to some critics, the use of the image in the Baroque era indicates a marked change in that culture. It has been stated that "the seventeenth century marks the beginning of an age which has been aptly described as the civilization of the image, and which is none other than our modern civilization" (Argan 10). The use of images in Baroque art, then, becomes the basis of how we use images today.
In the Baroque age, the imagery used in poetry no longer is simple; within the texts, the images themselves develop a more complex, comprehensive nature. Like an exercise in deconstructionist theory, the images reflect the meaning that the literary tradition has generated for it and not objects in and of themselves. The imagery serves an integral part in poetry conveying a significance that is built upon a whole of literary tradition. The complicated nature of the image used in Baroque literature is, according to some, due to its independent standing as a concept. As a critic states,

It is true that the seventeenth century is the century of the great allegories, but the allegories are not images reduced to concepts; on the contrary, they are concepts reduced to images. There is no attempt to make the image a concept, but rather to give to the concept, transposed into image, a force which does not support a demonstration but, as in the quality of the image, a practical entreaty. (Argan 19)

The concepts that are reduced to images are not Baroque inventions: they are products of the natural evolution of the emblem books of the Renaissance. The force of the image in literature carries the poem, and such dramatic forms as the masque, toward the realm of the symbolic and, as many modern readers bemoan, the enigmatic nature for which the literature of the Baroque is so often criticized.

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10 This complex meaning is not just based on the literary tradition, however, for the use of images stretches itself beyond the secular realm. As Praz states of the emblematists, “the century which produced the great mystics produced also the emblematists: they seem opposites, and frequently these opposites are found united in the same person. Perhaps because their imagination was too vivid they sought shelter in a world emptied of perception, in the ineffable” (16). Obviously, emblematic literature was considered worthy for the description of the divine in mystic contexts where the text is directly divinely inspired. It is interesting to note that in the consideration of the use of the emblem, a stylistic concern at best, there is an attempt on behalf of the critic to determine the spiritual nature of the author and their subconscious.

11 As time passed, Baroque art style evolved its own imagery. The Renaissance traditions, though always the source, became distant as the Baroque developed a unique way all its own. It is stated that “in the works of the mature baroque the distance from the beginnings of emblematics in the previous century becomes progressively more apparent, the similarity to the symbol becomes more fleeting, and the hieratic ostentation more assertive” (Benjamin 169).
Another theme widely touched upon in the Baroque era is that of extremes. In many of the texts of the era, there is an interest in unfurling the gamut of permutations of either a feeling or a situation. The beautiful and the grotesque are placed side by side as the author situates the self between the two extremes of his/her reality. As Walter Benjamin states, “the baroque apotheosis is a dialectical one. It is accomplished in the movement between extremes. In this eccentric and dialectic process the harmonious inwardness of classicism plays no role” (160). The focus is taken away from a central image and placed on the whole range of existence. The Counter Reformation impacted the way art was conceived as it impacted the way the world was perceived. “In the physical world,” notes one critic, “Aquinas found metaphysical significance: one can (and must) go outside of the mind to the body, the senses, and the world, in order to discover both the self and God. This Thomistic theology informed every aspect of the Catholic Reformation, including the rich realism of its Baroque forms of visual expression” (Zamora 402). By heightening the importance of the senses in the theological realm, the artistic realm was free to experiment with sensation and fullness.

The style of this type of writing is, as some call it, disoriented. There is a lack of a nucleus, yet the artistic production is saturated with a variety of details, all of which equally command attention. According to Díaz-Plaja, “la forma se tiñe de esta desorientada voluntad sujeta a los más bárbaros contrastes, y el Seiscientos es así un maravilloso espectáculo que, como una catarata, funde el más rugidor abismo al tornasol más bello. La confusión adquiere un instante de frenética intensidad” (14-15) ‘the form is tainted by this disoriented will that is subject to the most barbarous
contrasts, and the Baroque is in this way a marvelous spectacle that, like a waterfall, unites the most howling of abysses with the most beautiful sunflower. The confusion acquires an instant of frenetic intensity.' The lack of direct attention to a singular aspect of the work adds to the text an intensity or energy that, though disorienting, moves the reader to a new realization. The Baroque opposition to unity of thought seems to lead to the conclusion that truth, if it is sought, does not lie in the reconciliation of opposing forces, or the conquest of one over the other, but, instead, truth lies in the acceptance of them both. Despite this need to accept both sides of the coin, the art work itself is situated in the midst of the conflict. "Abstracting the dominant themes of Baroque literature," states a scholar, "conflict expectedly appears as one of the most prominent" (Segel 67). The extremes, never mitigated, were constantly playing at war in the field of art.

It is important to note in this discussion that the fascination with extremes was not just found in art and literature. The society as a whole was caught between extremes: from the religious environment to the socio-political milieu, everyday life was lived in the midst of opposing forces. The religious goals of Church and State in the age of the Counter Reformation were extremes in and of themselves. "Christianity must be restored to its pristine state, on the one hand and," summarizes one critic, "on the other, diffused in its purest form" (Leonard 24). The aims of the times, to maintain and grow, were as equally contradictory as those aims presented in the arts. In this way, the extremes depicted in art are not solely artistic creations.
The play between extremes becomes a dynamic element in literature. There is a fleeting moment in the study of opposites where the reader stands between the poles of reality and attempts to situate the self. This quality, found not only in the Baroque, becomes a constant feature in the literature of the time. Díaz-Plaja states that “por un azar que a mí me parece muy significativo lo estable es, en la literatura y el arte de España, lo que lleva fermentando en su intimidad esa sensación de vuelo o caída. Lo pasajero es lo equilibrado” (11) ‘by a stroke of luck that to me appears to be very significant, the stable aspect of the literature and art of Spain is what it carries seething in its entrails, that is the sensation of flight or fall. The fleeting is what is steady.’ The literature and art of Spain, in this opinion, evolved in such a way as to have inconstancy as its only constant.

The Baroque period, then, exists in a dynamic state: a tumbling forward. The literature and art of the Baroque display tendencies toward movement, albeit directionless as it lacks focus and purpose. The move toward a de-centered view of the world is not always seen as progress. In fact, Díaz-Plaja, after discussing the constant inconstancy of the art of the Baroque states, “pues bien, el Seiscientos marca un retroceso: la realidad ha dejado de ser una idealidad potenciada. No va más allá de sus límites. La especulación devota participa también de este retroceso” (104) ‘well, the Baroque demarcates a backwards movement: reality has stopped being a potential ideal.

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12 It is this dynamic nature that leads some critics to state that “el barroquismo destaca un impulso hacia el movimiento, la exuberancia, la complicación, la audacia, la intensidad” (Carilla Gongorismo 16) ‘the Baroque style emphasizes an impulse toward movement, exuberance, complication, audacity, intensity.’ In the criticism of Baroque art style there is a notion that this style has come into being to break apart the existing stillness and to inject not a new whole, but a symphony of parts.
It does not go any further than its limits. Religious speculation also participates in this backward movement. The focus on the varying details of reality in the works of art kept the works from portraying human life as having the potential of being ideal. The collection of elements that constituted life, according to this new form of art, made art works much more of a report than an idealization. The attention of the work would not rest on a particular object but, instead, be shared by various, sometimes contradictory, objects. This led Baroque art to be much more an accumulation of traces of reality. As one critic describes the process:

By using variety and ornament cumulatively in support of a central unity, the Baroque artist aimed at responses that could be emotional as well as aesthetic and intellectual. The "piling" or cumulative technique produced a tension that sought—and eventually was rewarded with—release (which is why the technique is not precisely the same thing as the *blason* or "catalogue-making" of poets of an earlier time). (Segel 29)

The goal of the artist, then, was not to give a heightened importance to a central object or issue but to create an image that was realistic in that it was reigned in by the same limits as the rest of reality. This course toward the multiplicity of objects may be a

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13 This unfocused accumulation of bits and pieces of reality was not unique to Spanish literature. It was also found in English literature of the time. As one critic states, the meditative style of the English poets is a method in which the writers know to be in touch with the divine through the attention to details. The critic states, “thus, the learning, the logic, the philosophy that help to form this individual self are easily joined with perceptions of a bird, or a broom, or a love-ballad: for all these things are viewed as descending, though sometimes once removed, from a central source of creative power. Meditative style, then, is ‘current language heightened,’ molded, to express the unique being of an individual who has learned, by intense mental discipline, to live his life in the presence of divinity. It is not only the style of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, or Marvell: it may also be found in Robert Southwell, Edward Taylor, Blake, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, the later Yeats, and the later Eliot” (Martz 324).
step backwards, as it is according to Díaz-Plaja, since it does not leave the possibility of a Truth, undeniable and uncontested.14

This lack of focus, and the lack of a unifying Truth, can be said to be democratic in nature. As Díaz-Plaja notes, “hasta ahora la realidad se jerarquizaba alrededor de la nobleza. La Divinidad, la mujer perfecta o el varón fuerte centran la escenografía y, concéntricamente, el valor plástico de las cosas se iba perdiendo al alejarse. Con el barroco, esta noción se pierde, y cada objeto, cada corpusculo reclama para sí, disgregadoramente, la atención más minuciosa y expresiva” (106) ‘until now, reality was hierarchically organized around the nobility. The Divine, the perfect woman, or the strong lord, was the center of the scenery and, concentrically, the plastic value of things decreased upon getting further [from the center]. With the Baroque, this notion is lost and each object, each corpuscle claims for itself, in a disintegrating manner, the most careful and expressive attention.’ The world stops rotating around the blessed, and in a democratic spirit, starts valuing the whole of creation “disintegrating” the set pattern that until then had given the world structure, with each thing having fixed values. Baroque art perception paid heed to the call of the small, the ugly, and the common and, in so doing, unraveled the traditional fabric of reality.

14 The extremes in emotions were a topic of interest in Baroque art, especially in the poetry from Spain. In Baroque literature, there grew an interest for the emotions of everyday life. The senses came to the forefront as the details of feeling became the focus of many works. “The Baroque sensualization of experience,” states one critic, “had its subjective as well as its objective side. The portrayal of the inner life of man, which had not been a matter of much concern to the Mannerists, suddenly came to the fore in the early seventeenth century” (Martin 73). No longer was the focus on external manners but on the whole of emotion, external and internal, and the extremes that it produced and in which it dwelled.
The newly placed emphasis on form, in the light of the loss of a central and unifying theme, seems to take away from the content of the work and add emphasis to the technique. By placing attention on the extremes of reality, the ability to form a coherent content message was diminished, heightening the importance of the examination of the extremes; the merit of a work was based on the able handling of the parts as compared to creating a unified whole. As noted, “contrary currents fused in the Baroque style and shifted importance from content to form” (Leonard 31). The focus on technique leads some critics to see the texts of the Baroque as devoid of deeper, more spiritual interest.\(^5\) This comes, of course, in direct opposition to the notion of all artistic production of the Baroque being the expressions of a spirit in crisis. For some critics, nevertheless, Baroque art is nothing more than an exercise in technique with no underlying, informing emotion. As a critic states, the soul in the Baroque disappears as frills take the center stage. The critic then explains how this came to be by stating that:

The vain quest of the ultimate undertaken by medieval science yielded to the more mundane and feasible aims of humanism, and the effort to reinstate that intellectual orthodoxy only restored considerable futility. The resulting frustration caused an unconscious substitution of the intellectual devices of scholasticism as ends in themselves and a

\(^5\) However, when speaking of technique and underlying spiritual messages, it is important to note that the critic will see what he/she is willing to see; the identification of both technique and of meaning is a very subjective issue. There is a brief overview of the mystics in Domínguez Ortiz where the literary rhetoric and technique in Teresa de Ávila is diminished as her spontaneity is aggrandized. The technique of St. Teresa is considered non-existent as Domínguez Ortiz states that “her style, despite its lack of literary pretension, is highly attractive by virtue of its spontaneity and expressive force” (252). (The subjective nature of this statement can best be understood after taking in consideration the work done by Allison Webber on the highly developed rhetoric and technique utilized by St. Teresa.) St. John of the Cross, on the other hand, is immediately praised for his literary skill despite the fact that he was a devout follower of St. Teresa. Of his work, it is stated that “there is a marvelous balance between the profundity of emotion and the perfection of form in his poems” (Domínguez Ortiz 252). Preconceived notions of the artists and their personalities, as well as the presence of an existing critical canon, influence the identification of what “technique” and “content” would be.
forsaking of the ultimate objectives. The effect was a tendency to shift from content to form, from ideas to details, to give new sanctions to dogmas, to avoid issues, and to substitute subtlety of language for subtlety of thought, it served to repress rather than liberate the human spirit, and to divert by spectacles, by overstatement, and by excessive ornamentation. Such, in essence, was the spirit of the so-called “Baroque Age” as manifested in the Hispanic world. (Leonard 28)

The Baroque, in this view, is then the quintessential futility of the human mind. The place of mankind in the whole of creation is no longer definable; the only thing that can be done is to comment on the details that surround.

The perception of Baroque art as artificial, due to the lack of soul as seen in the overtly technical considerations with which the art was executed, leads some to dismiss the literature as not heartfelt. Thus:

Así, las conclusiones . . . demuestran esa parcial visión y, en consecuencia, incomprensión del fenómeno barroco, o «secentismo», para emplear el termino a la italiana. Según él, el estilo nace de dos hechos concordes y conjuntos: el distanciamiento o la sofisticación de la realidad, y el estudio del arte sobre «poéticas». Y así pude llegar a la consecuencia de afirmar que el arte del seiscientos no es una cosa seria, una necesidad del espíritu, sino un desahogo exterior y artificial. (Orozco Díaz 31)

In this way, the conclusions . . . demonstrate that partial vision and, as a consequence, the incomprehension of the Baroque phenomenon or “secentismo,” to utilize the Italian term. According to the critic, the style is born from two corresponding and connected acts: the distancing [from] or the sophistication of reality, and the study of art according to ‘poetics.’ And with this I could come to the result of affirming that the art of the Baroque is not a serious thing, a necessity of the soul, but instead, an external and artificial unburdening.’

There seems to be the assumption that emotion and technique do not coexist in Baroque art. The amount of energy expended in technique, it is implied, denies the possibility of the art work serving as some form of expression. The perceived lack of emotional value
in the works, in turn, leads the critic to state that the artistic production is “not a serious thing.” the seriousness being a measure of how necessary the work was to the soul. In this view, the art of the Baroque is completely devoid of a spiritual need, it is an exercise in methods and nothing more. Clearly, the criticism of the Baroque also has a fascination with opposing extremes.

**Baroque Spain and Its Colonies**

The period here defined as the Baroque had a deep and lasting effect on the Spanish culture and artistic production. This is probably due to the interest that Spain took in the Counter Reformation. The Baroque, as a product of the religious crisis of the period, served as a catalyst for discussion of the traditional views of the past and the competing views as provided by the Protestant Reformation and the advent of science. One critic states of the Baroque that since it was “closely linked with the Counter Reformation it proved more durable in the south of the Continent. The Baroque is described as ‘a continuous polemic on the Catholic way of life with a mixture of the ideals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’” (Leonard 29). At question were not only dogmatic issues but also the whole of life as defined by tradition.

The Catholic Counter Reformation was captained by Spain. Spain, having recently finished the long process of ousting the Muslims and Jews from the country, perceived the Protestant Reformation as a serious threat to their hard-won victory of religious unification. Spain became the armed force behind the ways of religious tradition. The artistic environment of Spain, then, reflected this intolerant view of religious deviance. It is stated of Spain:
As the spiritual, intellectual, and social solidarities of Europe melted in the heat of revolutionary changes, the conservatism of the Catholic South hardened into a reactionary intransigence. Spain, which had become a mighty empire under the sixteenth century Hapsburgs, assumed the role of champion of orthodoxy, and its rulers took an uncompromising stand on the side of traditionalism. This resolute attitude dominated the Council of Trent and set the tone of the Counter Reformation, thus defeating the hope of reconciliation with the Protestant North. (Leonard 24)

Radiating from the south, the force of the Catholic Counter Reformation attempted to fight the growing Protestantism of the north. Spain's role in this evangelizing movement is one that allowed for no defiance and can be best described as totalitarian.

Because of Spain's front row position in this battle of religious views, present in the Hispanic world was a hyperactive sense of religiosity that impregnated all aspects of society. In Spain as well as its colonial territories, "simple belief and the complete acceptance of authority in every field of thought made for righteousness in the Hispanic views, and they offered the best guarantee of salvation. 'In the seventeenth century you do not breathe a "normal" air of belief,' observes a modern Spanish scholar, 'but, rather, something like an oxygen of faith'" (Leonard 24). With such an elevated religious environment, religious issues, such as that of salvation, were critical in everyday life. The concern for such issues assured that they would find a place in the arts.

The religiously influenced art of Spain, however, had little impact on the rest of Europe. According to some, the Spanish empire was artistically isolated from the rest of Europe. One critic, Bazin, notes that, "in the field of visual art, however, Spanish influence—in Europe at least—was almost nil" (20). In its battle against the Protestant
Reformation of the north, Spain became culturally isolated, free to follow its own course in artistic evolution without influence from others and without influencing the other European nations. However, in its zeal to recreate itself as a European country after the Moorish occupation, Spain had decided to follow the literary traditions of Europe. As one critic states, "... the determination to claim the European heritage for Spain resulted in a metonymic association between Petrarchist lyric and the Spanish empire. Lyric poetry thus played a unique role in the Spanish struggle for cultural self-justification" (Navarrete 2). Once the European tradition had been absorbed into the grain of Spanish life, however, interest seemed to cease in artistic interaction with the rest of Europe as Spain became isolated once again. The European tradition absorbed by the Spanish artist then began a process of evolving in a unique manner; having started with the same influences, nowhere else in Europe did the arts evolve as they did in Spain.

The New World, with its expansive territory and its non-European-educated population, provided an endless terrain over which Spain had sole rights to influence. As Bazin goes on to further explain, "a part of the Kingdom, of Naples, to which it gave Ribera, Iberian art had no real communication with the rest of Europe; its field of expansion was overseas, mainly in Latin America, where imported Baroque art, grafted onto native stock, produced magnificent and often strange flowers" (20). Baroque art, with its lack of focus, allowed for the acceptance of indigenous elements in the American hemisphere. So began the syncretic nature of art from the American colonies,
utilizing the techniques of the Baroque while borrowing from the Native American cultures.

Baroque is often seen as the denial of the simple or, better yet, the denial of the linear perception of evolution. The Baroque, in some accounts, is uniquely American. In the same way that it is hard to define the Baroque because of its complex nature, the term baroque can then be applied to those things which are syncretic in nature. It is this that the following critic has done when he states that,

Al contrario de la estética renacentista, el Barroco niega la línea, niega la búsqueda de elementos homogéneos, tiene aversión al ángulo recto. ¿En qué medida estas categorías estéticas pueden introducirnos en una reflexión sobre el fenómeno histórico? El camino más conocido es el que nos explica que la estética barroca es la estética del mestizaje. El ejemplo más conocido es el de la Virgen de Guadalupe. (Theodoro da Silva 89)

Contrary to the renaissance aesthetic, the Baroque negates the line, negates the search for homogenous elements, has an aversion toward the square angle. In what way can these aesthetic categories introduce us to a reflection of historical phenomenon? The best-known path is that which explains to us the baroque aesthetic as the aesthetic of mestizaje [syncretism]. The best-known example is that of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The application of the term baroque to the American reality, due to its plurality of heritages, makes clear the ambiguous definition that the term baroque can have.

However, it also clarifies the eclectic nature of the Baroque.16

16 In some cases, Baroque art mentality in the colonization is seen as a force that allowed for the tolerance of native cultures. It is stated of North America that “esta parte de América, al norte, desconoce el Barroco y, por ese motivo, es incapaz de tener otra relación que no sea la de exclusión del indígena y de todos los objetos y concepciones de vida que no sean similares” (Theodoro da Silva 94) “this part of America, to the north, does not know the Baroque and, for this reason, is incapable of having any other relation that is not one of exclusion towards the indigenous and all objects and concepts of life that are not similar.” In this opinion, the North American countries are at a disadvantage in accepting the Other due to the fact that they were never Baroque.
What allows Baroque art to migrate and melt into the art of the New World is the unfocused gaze with which it saw the world. The fact that the perception provided by Baroque art was not based on a coherent view of the world but, instead, on the details that made up the world, the inclusion of the New World, with its never before seen reality, was possible. As it is stated, “al valorizar lo pictórico, la masa y la ausencia de simetría, el Barroco rompe con la estética renacentista, que producía una visión especular entre culturas” (Theodoro da Silva 91) ‘in valorizing the visual, amplitude and the absence of symmetry, the Baroque breaks with the Renaissance aesthetic which produced mirror images between cultures.’ Where Renaissance perception led the artist to see the Other as a reflection of the self, Baroque art provides room for uniqueness. Baroque art forms, less interested in constructing a coherent world, allowed for the representation of the unincorporated unknown. The inclusion of the native cultures has no better example than in the religious art created in the New World. Indigenous artisans learned the styles of Europe and incorporating many native elements, created a world where the Baroque art of omateness embraced New World art and culture. In this way, Sor Juana, writing from Mexico, was never far from the European literary tradition. Her works, however, are so ingrained in the European traditions that they can hardly be said to be syncretic in nature.

17 This view is better stated by Theodoro da Silva who states that the art, “expresándose a través del exceso (si tomamos como referencia la estética renacentista), la fragmentación de la cultura indígena y la muerte del significado, el Barroco permite la disimulación del universo indígena y lo presenta aparentemente integrado a un arte sacro” (91) ‘expressing itself through excess (if we take as reference Renaissance aesthetics), the fragmentation of the indigenous culture and the death of the signified, the Baroque permits the dissimulation of the indigenous universe and presents it apparently integrated into religious art.’
John Donne and His Baroque

It is imperative to remember that the Baroque period had an impact on all writers of the era. Of interest in the study of Sor Juana are other authors in different areas of the world who displayed many of the same tendencies as hers. These authors are examples of the pervading force of culturally contextual concerns. A wonderful example of another author who exhibits many of the same concerns as Sor Juana is the English poet John Donne. Writing in a newly converted Protestant England, John Donne was influenced by many elements of the Catholic Church. When writing of Donne, it is stated that it is necessary to study his fellow authors before being able to evaluate his works. A critic states, “to speak more simply, before we evaluate Donne’s conduct and his writing, we need to ask what his friends and contemporaries were doing and saying at about the same time, and what were their shared conditions of material and intellectual practice” (Patterson 42). As it is true for Donne, it must hold true for Sor Juana as she lived in the midst of many of the same social tensions.

Donne, like many of the other writers of the Baroque, utilized the senses in his works in order to move the reader to a deeper understanding. Unlike some of the other authors, however, Donne did not always use a higher register vocabulary in his texts. Much like Sor Juana, as is seen in the next chapter, Donne decided not to rely always on the exorbitant lexicon of the time. As defined by Louis Martz, the aspects of Donne’s writing are much like those of a nun on the other side of the Atlantic. Martz states,
Developed in a series of influential books issued during the 1930's, the definition [of Baroque poetry] views Donne as the master and father of a new kind of English poetry, with these distinguishing marks: an acute self-consciousness that shows itself in minute analysis of moods and motives; a conversational tone and accent, expressed in language that is "as a rule simple and pure"; highly unconventional imagery, including the whole range of human experience, from theology to the commonest details of bed and board; an "intellectual, argumentative evolution" within each poem, a "strain of passionate paradoxical reasoning which knits the first line to the last" and which often results in "the elaboration of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it"; above all, including all, that "unification of sensibility" which could achieve "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling," and made it possible for Donne to feel his thought "as immediately as the odour of a rose." (2)

The Baroque influence is obvious in this description of Donne's writing style. Of special interest is that in perfectly conventional Baroque manner, the imagery is "highly unconventional" and there is an unfocused view of the world within the text; the whole as an aggregation of many detailed parts. Many of the other aspects mentioned will find resonance in the writings of Sor Juana studied later. His use of the sensual in his poetry allowed for a multidimensional narrative of what Donne intended to communicate.18

The love poetry of Donne will also find a parallel model in Sor Juana's poetry. Like the nun, and most other writers of the time, Donne followed the pattern of love poetry that was set by Petrarch. As Martz explains:

In his love-poems, then, the central wit consists in this: in taking up the religious motifs conventionally displayed in Petrarchan verse, and

18 In fact, Donne serves as a perfect example of recreating an emotion or circumstance through the listing of many comparisons. One critic notes that "Donne, as a writer, was only good at one thing, though that one thing is very intense and valuable. He was good at communicating his own experience, and he could only do this by showing what the experience was made of. In the poems he could say, 'It was like this and this and this,' and all the while he was building up these analogies, he was also communicating the feeling of the experience in his own tough music" (Webber 12). The tough music of Donne was the tough music of many other authors of the century.
stressing them so heavily that any one of three results may be achieved. Sometimes the effect is one of witty blasphemy, as in “The Dreame,” where he deifies his lady by attributing her arrival in his bedroom to her Godlike power of reading his mind. Sometimes, as in “The Extasie,” the poem maintains a complex tone in which the playful and the solemn, the profane and the sacred, are held in a perilous poise. . . And at other times human love is exalted to the religious level, notably in “A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day,” where . . . Donne presents a midnight service, a “Vigill,” commemorating the death of his beloved—his saint. (213-214)

Using the Petrarchan pattern, Donne mixed the secular and religious language in order to produce descriptions of divinely ideal lovers. The use of wit in the love poetry, as well as in other forms of writings, is also a shared trait.¹⁹

Of the critical approaches taken to the works of Donne, one of the most relevant in this study of Sor Juana is that of Annabel Patterson, who states that the evolution in literary criticism may have finally come to a point where coherence within the works of one author is no longer necessary. She states,

But perhaps we are now capable of retelling Donne’s story with a different emphasis. If we could purge from the idea of an oeuvre the ideal of coherence, we might be able to look at the whole Donne and see him not as a monster of ambition but as a mass of contradictions, many of which were known to himself and warily or wittily expressed as self-division; and if we can reframe the historical goal as cultural analysis, rather than biographical criticism (with its almost irresistible tendency to judge), we might be able to focus on what Foucault called discursive relations . . . (Patterson 42)

Patterson, like Americo Castro, calls for an attempt to study literature with less prejudice. In order to do this, the author’s life needs to be seen not as explicative of the

¹⁹ For a detailed study of the way that John Donne’s work fits into the spectrum provided by other arts see David Evett’s “Donne’s Poems and the Five Styles of Renascence Art” in the John Donne Journal (5.1-2 [1986]: 101-131).
words, but as something external to the texts even though they may be related. Seeing the author as a “mass of contradictions” provides a hindrance to the impulse to oversimplify the author as well as the works.

Supporting the idea that John Donne was a “mass of confusion,” Martz states that it is incorrect to believe that Donne first wrote his worldly poetry and later turned his attention to writing religious works. According to Martz, as in the case of Sor Juana, the production of secular texts and religious texts were concurrent. Martz states that “One must observe, then, the greatest possible caution in considering the relation between the ‘profane’ and the ‘religious’ in Donne’s work: individual poems will not fall easily into such categories; nor can the poems be safely dated by assumptions about the more religious, and the less religious, periods of his life” (216). Despite Donne’s marked evolution in his own life and beliefs, his writings showed a varied interest at all times. As Martz further clarifies, “Donne may well have written some of his love-songs and some of his ‘Holy Sonnets’ during the same periods of his life” (216). The supposition that an author will write only one type of work, and that the type will reflect the kinds of emotion present at that stage of life, is necessarily challenged by the assertion that seemingly opposing works are produced at the same time by one artist.

Once again, there seems to be a negative evaluation of Donne’s Baroque stylistics. As one critic defiantly states, Donne’s use of words in his writings reflect nothing but his willingness to control reader reaction. For Stanley Fish, Donne’s concern is the power that he can gain through words. He states,
Let's get the diagnosis out of the way immediately: Donne is bulimic, someone who gorges himself to a point beyond satiety, and then sticks his finger down his throat and throws up. The object of his desire and of his abhorrence is not food, but words, and more specifically, the power words can exert. Whatever else Donne's poems are, they are preeminently occasions on which this power can be exercised; they report on its exercise and stage it again in the reporting, and when one asks about a moment in the poetry, "Why is it thus?" the answer will always be "in order further to secure the control and domination the poet and his surrogates continually seek." This is, I think, what Judith Herz is getting at in a recent fine essay when she remarks that "Donne... will say anything if the poem seems to need it," an observation I would amend by insisting that the need to be satisfied is not the poem's but the poet's, and that it is the need first to create a world and then endlessly to manipulate those who are made to inhabit it. (Fish 223-224)

Although not a very romantic view of the process of writing poetry, this opinion of Donne's literary production does wonders to counteract the criticism that sees literature as an effervescence of the soul. Inherent in this view of the poet who writes what is needed either by the poem or himself is the realization that the author is creating a false realm under personal control. This realm has no obligations to either the author's or the reader's personal reality. It is a realm of words, created to provide the author control and power through the manipulation of words. In this light, it should not be forgotten that Donne, as well as Sor Juana, was able to translate literary success into physical gain and power.

In conclusion, the Baroque, for our purposes, can be defined as a time of flux that allowed for a style that ensconced itself in the study of extremes. Though the soul may indeed be perceived in the artistic productions of the time, as Fish points out about Donne, there was a self-awareness on behalf of the artists: their works were their participation in the public milieu and were crafted accordingly. The Baroque period is a
time in which conflict and contradiction become the accepted mode in art. The focus of the period shifted away from the perfect and pristine and started to take into consideration the ruined and decayed. This process is highlighted by the observation that “by its very essence classicism was not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature. But beneath its extravagant pomp, this is precisely what baroque allegory proclaims, with unprecedented emphasis” (Benjamin 176). As seen in Gongóra’s chilling poem reminding the fair lady that in time she will physically deteriorate into nothing (“en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sombra, en nada” Sonnet CLXVI), the process of aging became the theme of some of the most notable poems of the Baroque. The human being no longer inhabited the perfect world of the Renaissance and the Classical age where the ideal form was venerated; the world had become more complex as the scenery had allowed entry to the commonplace and the grotesque. The acceptance of the complex, in world perception as well as in art, allowed for the creation of competing discourses in literature. It is in this aspect of the Baroque that Sor Juana participated fully. In a world where the contradictory and the complicated were supreme, the nun writing love poetry was free to work within the traditions present.

It is in this world, where conflicting ideas happily coexisted, that Sor Juana lived and worked. The Baroque mode, allowed a writer to be both secular and spiritual. Like John Donne, the nun was free to have both political interests, as will be seen in the next chapter, and to lead a contemplative life. The opposition between technique and content can be seen in Sor Juana. In her most ornate poetry, the extravagant usage of
imagery and symbolism seem to hide any actual meaning. In other works, the nun writes with such clarity there can be no mistaking her intended message. In tune with a world in transition, the nun wrote in many styles and with many ends in sight. Both the simple and the ornate found a place in her texts, along with the superficial and the hidden. The extremes which united to form a whole, in this case, points to the critical complaint that in the writing of the Baroque period there is a lack of interest in expressing the soul. Indeed, the soul of the artist is hard to detect between extremes in content and technique. This difficulty makes the Baroque an ideal place to study artist intentionality.
Chapter 2. Rhetoric at Play: The Innocence of Literature as Work

Through the use of rhetoric, Sor Juana projects an image of herself that is compliant with what the society of her time required of a nun. The portrait of Sor Juana that can be ascertained through her writings is not reflective of the author as it is reflective of how Sor Juana desires to be seen. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a professional writer. Her works were written for a public, for compensation, and, in the end, for fame. Though she states that she does not seek popularity, her interest (and success) in entertaining, in writing accessible and worthy poetry and drama, make this claim an obvious part of her rhetoric. The existing criticism of her works suffers from the view that Sor Juana wrote in isolation, which is unfortunately reflected in the study of her works. However, Sor Juana wrote for an active audience and was concerned with not just reception but also tradition. The nun's writings thrust the author into the public realm where she stayed visible for the whole of her writing career (more than 20 years). Here, under the observant eyes of the world around her, the author flourished both artistically and economically.

Sor Juana's incredibly varied works show that she was comfortable writing about many themes and in many formats. Because of her ability to write on seemingly anything, the recurrence of certain themes throughout her writings show a marked interest in those topics. The deliberate nature of her option to write of themes makes it possible to assume that the topics she chose to exploit exhibit a personal interest. Her silence on some themes and participation in other genres point not only to artistic intention, but also to the pressures and social limitations she faced. If Sor Juana is
perceived as a professional writer, conscious of every detail of her art, a detailed study of her rhetoric should be rewarding. Her rhetoric of submissiveness, indifference, and effusiveness may then take their place not as personality traits but as elements designed to deflect any possible accusations of arrogance and earthly concerns.

As a nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was susceptible to the whims of those in power in the Catholic Church. In order to write freely, Sor Juana’s recourse was to implement a rhetoric within her texts that promoted an image of herself that was compliant with the propriety required of a nun. Sor Juana claimed to write solely with the aim of pleasing the powerful figures who were her patrons. By taking the guise of someone who wrote out of obedience, Sor Juana was able to distance herself from her writing, thus fending off accusations of greed or ambition. By highlighting her inferior status and diminishing the importance of the author in light of the text, Sor Juana could relinquish responsibility for her writings and, more importantly, for the publication of her writings. Through the rhetoric of indifference, Sor Juana actively warded off any accusations of arrogance of pride. Combined with a rhetoric of submissiveness, her stance of indifference made it possible for Sor Juana to portray her writings as mandated by others and of little personal concern to her. Through the rhetoric of effusiveness, Sor Juana explains that her literary production is a natural expression and, hence, not premeditated. This argument acts as support for her other two arguments in portraying her authorship as accidental – inconsequential to her person yet a product of a God-given talent and, thus, a perfect way in which she could serve others. She declared herself to be an effusive writer, a woman who wrote effortlessly. Through this
argument, Sor Juana could claim that what she did, on the behest of others, she did easily and, therefore, innocently. As stated, these declarations were made in an attempt to minimize the amount of attention that her person received. The texts, then, could be published and widely disseminated, but the author, in her convent, could remain safe from the criticisms that would have her pen fall silent.

That Sor Juana faced active criticism from within the Catholic Church can be seen clearly in the interaction that occurred after the publishing of her Carta Atenagórica. In a public manner, the Bishop of Puebla, Fernández de Santa Cruz, wrote to her under the name of Sor Filotea de la Cruz. In his letter, published alongside the Carta Atenagórica, the Bishop criticized Sor Juana’s interest in writing, referring to education in women as unnecessary. He states, “Letras que engendran elación, no las quiere Dios en la mujer; pero no las reprueba el Apóstol cuando no sacan a la mujer del estado de obediente” (Santa Cruz 695) ‘Literature that engenders exaltation, God does not want in women; but the Apostle does not reproach them when they do not take the woman out of the obedient state.’ Though this was the most public of reproaches, there are signs that Sor Juana constantly had to defend her right to write. Sor Juana guarded herself from censorship through rhetoric.

These rhetorical tools, however, are only rhetorical tools. In spite of these arguments, Sor Juana’s works show an acute awareness of styles and content that point the reader in the opposite direction. Sor Juana wrote utilizing so many techniques and formats that it is illogical to believe her when she states that she did not think about what she wrote. The complexities of Sor Juana’s writings make it impossible to believe
that she wrote either in an effusive manner or indifferently. The use of audience-specific techniques, playing to the tastes of those who would be her public, makes it impossible to claim that she was not aware of the public nature of her works and was not concerned with their reception. The rhetoric of Sor Juana served as a way to control and create her public image. At a time and place in which her writing could be problematic due to her status as a woman and a nun, Sor Juana creates an image of herself as meek, compliant, humble and, mostly, non-challenging. As a professional writer who carefully crafted her texts, Sor Juana’s works are far from being effusive statements that are confessional in nature or even reflective of the author’s psychology. The importance of solidifying the position of Sor Juana as a professional writer lies in this, that only after her texts are read as consciously created works of art, made to garner popularity and participate in public literary circles, while keeping the author free from charges of impropriety, can they be seen as intricately designed to fulfill many functions. To see her writing as actually effusive is to deny her ability to encode deliberate messages in her texts. The nun wrote texts that satisfied the requirements of propriety, participated fully in the realm of literary tradition, and openly questioned and challenged social and literary convention. All of her works, however, were carefully couched in a rhetoric that insisted on her innocence as an author. Had her writings been effusive or confessional in nature, it would be impossible to explain the presence of all of these characteristics found in her works, since they would be rendered coincidental and inconsequential.
A number of literary aspects point to Sor Juana's professional status. Her conscious use of literary techniques is the most obvious. If she had not intended to profit from her texts and to be read widely, why would she have included popular aspects in her writings? Her religious writings are mostly works on commission from the Catholic Church. Her use of tradition in depicting herself and her writing betray a complete awareness of her role as an artist according to tradition and her literary dependence on her patron. All of these things point to a self-acceptance of her role as a writer and a determination to be read.

After a concise account of Sor Juana's biography and her social situation, this chapter will then briefly survey the whole of Sor Juana's works. The social poetry, the religious poetry, the drama, and her prose will be touched upon with an emphasis on Sor Juana's use of rhetoric and of literary techniques that point to her status as a professional author. Accentuated will be the use of literary technique she chose to use in accordance with the destined audience. The social functions of her texts as well as the desired effect will also be studied.

**Biography of a Nun**

According to her friend and biographer Father Diego Calleja, Sor Juana was born in the town of San Miguel de Nepantla, on November 12, 1651. This date, however, has been questioned by some modern scholars upon the unearthing of a document recording the baptism of an "Inés," born in the same parish, that has her aunt
and uncle as godparents. However, there is no listing of parents on this record.\(^1\) This
document, which places the birth date in 1648, has been sufficient evidence for some
scholars to eschew the traditional date and accept this earlier date.\(^2\) Other scholars,
however, feel it unfounded to question the poet’s self-reported birth date based only on
a loose and inconclusive slip of paper.\(^3\) This controversy over the simplest of facts is
indicative of the studies surrounding every aspect of Sor Juana’s biography, making
only one thing true: the most simple facts of this nun’s life have evaded the ever-
scrutinizing eyes of posterity. The lack of information on her personal life has led to an
immensity of works designed to fill in the blanks, extrapolating biographical

\(^1\) This information can be found in Guillermo Ramirez España, *La Familia de Sor Juana* (México:
Imprenta Universitaria, 1947), and in Enrique A. Cervantes, *Testamento de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y

\(^2\) Using this new information, Octavio Paz states of Calleja “Hay razones para creer que se
equivocó... Es casi seguro que la Inés del acta de 1648 sea nuestra Juana Inés. Así, era tres años mayor
de lo que dice su biógrafo” (96-7) ‘There are reasons to believe that he erred... It is almost certain that
the Inés of the 1648 document is our Juana Inés. If so, she was three years older than what her biographer
states’. This reading, of course, colors the whole perception of Sor Juana. Instead of being a child prodigy,
leaving home at an early age, participating in court life, creating for herself a reputation for brilliance, and
deciding to enter a cloister by the age of 18, the new date would have us believe her to be older, and
therefore, somehow less extraordinary. Had the nun given an earlier date than what was true, it would also
mean that the nun actively desired to be seen as a prodigy.

\(^3\) In her introduction to *Inundación Castalida*, Georgina Sabat Rivers states that: “Aunque el
padre Calleja cometió, al parecer, un error al decirnos que Juana había nacido un viernes (en vez de un
domingo según se ha asegurado después), y calculó los años que tenía a su muerte en cuarenta y cuatro (en
vez de cuarenta y tres), no nos parece que los nuevos datos sean suficiente prueba para cambiar la fecha
que la misma monja le daría a su amigo jesuita, su primer biógrafo” (11) ‘Even though Father Calleja did
commit an error, it seems, when he stated that Juana had been born on a Friday (instead of a Sunday, as it
has been ascertained afterwards), and calculated her age at death to be forty four (instead of forty three), it
does not seem to us that the new dates provided should be sufficient proof to change the date that the nun
herself would give to her Jesuit friend, her first biographer.’ Sabat Rivers proceeds to explain the many
possible scenarios that may explain the coincidences of the names on the baptismal document without
doubting the nun’s knowledge of her own age.
information from her poems to create a story of her life that explains, or resolves, her writing and her works.

It has been noted that a simple, irrefutable, biography of the famous poet has yet to be written. What is positively known of the nun’s life comes from the small amount of documentation of her life before entering the convent, the convent records, and her writings. Her personal life and psychology, long a topic of widespread speculation, cannot be conclusively determined from the things left to us. Her writings, though copious, are not personal in nature; they are neither confessional nor introspective in any clear manner. The public nature of Sor Juana’s works should encourage the critic to consider Sor Juana as a professional writer – a writer who knew that she would have a wide audience and wrote in order to benefit economically and socially from her works. From the beginning of her career, she was cognizant that everything she wrote would fall under the scrutiny of the powers of the Catholic Church. She was aware that her

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4 Pfandl, in his introduction to his 1946 book, *Die Zehnte Muse von México: Juana Inés de la Cruz* (translated into Spanish by Juan Antonio Ortega y Medina, 1963), states the “resolution” of Sor Juana as the purpose of his book. He remarks upon the state of the criticism by saying that “El origen y la razón de ser del talento de Juana, las particularidades de su vida amorosa, el porqué de su repentina huida del mundo y su retirada al convento, . . . son todavía problemas sin resolver. . . . [N]ó únicamente declarar, sino asimismo aclarar, descortezar y separar estratos, desatar nudos, sacar a la luz del día lo que está escondido y transformar lo inconsciente en visible y consciente. Éste y no otro ha de ser por consiguiente el propósito y programa de nuestro libro” (12-13) ‘The origin and reason of the existence of Juana’s talent, the particularities of her love life, the grounds for her hurried departure from the world and her retreat into the convent, . . . are still problems without resolution. . . . [N]ot only to declare, but also to clarify, to polish and to separate layers, to untie knots, to bring out into the light of day what is hidden and to transform the unconscious into the visible and conscious. That, and no other, is to be the purpose and program of our book.’

5 The absence of facts surrounding Sor Juana’s personal life has been lamented throughout the texts dedicated to the criticism of her works. Noting this fact, Octavio Paz quotes Dorothy Schons saying in 1926 that “La biografía de Sor Juana está todavía por escribirse,” and adds “Hoy, cincuenta años después, la situación no ha variado” (89) ‘The biography of Sor Juana is yet to be written,” now, fifty years later, the situation has not changed.’
position as a woman writing, without the benefit of high social ranking and the social
power that status provided, made her vulnerable to possible censorship. As her fame
grew, she must have been conscious that her public also had expanded to that of the
literate world she inhabited. She was read from the court in México City to the one in
Madrid, and, most importantly, she was aware that her writings fell under the scrutiny
of the Inquisition censors. To read her works as documents of her personal life,6 or as
reflections upon memories of her childhood or emotions,7 is to dismiss both her
knowledge of the public nature of her works and its dangers. The view of her works as
personal also serves as a dismissal of any possibility that she intended to utilize the
public voice which her fame provided her.

Born an illegitimate child in the periphery of a colony, Sor Juana did not enjoy a
high social status. After arriving in the capital of the colony at a young age, her fame as
a child prodigy grew and the Viceroy s of New Spain came to know and support her. As
a self-described artist by vocation,8 Sor Juana entered into the first of many artist-patron

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6 This approach to reading her writing, Octavio Paz claims, did not exist in her own time, as
"Ninguno de sus contemporáneos leyó sus poemas como un documento. Esta interpretación aparece por
primera vez en las páginas entusiastas que dedicó a su obra Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo" (143) "None of
her contemporaries read her poems as documents. This interpretation appears, for the first time, in the
enthusiastic pages that Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo dedicates to her work." Menéndez Pelayo wrote of Sor
Juana beginning in 1892.

7 The epitome of the flagrant, semi-poetic speculation in the criticism on Sor Juana is seen in
Jiménez Rueda, who in a close reading of a poem states, "El verso surgía de su alma con la facilidad con
que brota el agua de un surtidor. Sentía la música de las palabras al combinarse con la naturalidad con que
se produce la salida y la puesta del sol, el cintilar de las estrellas en el cielo" (21) "The verse surged out of
her soul with the ease in which water pours out of a sieve. She felt the music of the words when she
combined herself with the naturalness which produces the rising and the setting sun, the twinkling of the
stars in the heavens."

8 In her letter Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz, Sor Juana talks of writing as a calling. She
states, "Lo que sí es verdad y no negaré... que desde que me rayó la primera luz de la razón, fue tan
vehemente y poderosa la inclinación a las letras, que ni ajenas represiones —que he tenido muchas—, ni

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relationships with the Viceroy of New Spain in 1664, the Marqueses de Mancera, who took Sor Juana into their court. In 1667, with the help of the Viceroy, Sor Juana decided to leave court life and enter a convent. After a brief and unsatisfactory attempt to become a discalced Carmelite, Sor Juana entered the convent of St. Jerome in 1669. In 1673, the Marqueses de Mancera left México and returned to Spain. Sor Juana maintained an artist-patron relationship with them throughout her entrance into the convent and their departure from the colony. The Bishop Don Payo Enriquez de Ribera served as viceroy from 1673 until 1680. Sor Juana wrote some poems in his honor, though possibly not during his years in secular office. In 1680, the Marqueses de la Laguna became the new Viceroy of New Spain, holding the post until 1686, and Sor Juana developed a friendship with the Marqueses. They also served as her patrons. The Marquesa de la Laguna, also known as the Condesa de Paredes, was responsible for taking a collection of Sor Juana's poetry to Spain and publishing them under the title of *Inundación Castálida* in 1689. In 1688, the Condes de Galve became the viceroy, also served as her patrons, and were in power when Sor Juana died in 1695. The patronage of the viceroy played a key role in Sor Juana's liberty to write. It is under the protection of the viceroy that the nun was allowed so much freedom. As one critic

> propias reflejas—que he hecho no pocas—, han bastado a que deje de seguir este natural impulso que Dios puso en mi: Su Majestad sabe por qué y para qué...” (*Respuesta* 4:444) ‘But one truth I shall not deny... which is that from the moment I was first illuminated by the light of reason, my inclination toward letters has been so vehement, so overpowering, that not even the admonitions of others—and I have suffered many—nor my own meditations—and they have not been few—have been sufficient to cause me to forswear this natural impulse that God placed in me: the Lord God knows why, and for what purpose’ (*Poems* 11).

9 The “official” reason for her leaving the Carmelite convent, as reported by the nun and her biographer, is ill-health. It could be supposed, however, that a factor in the decision is that the Carmelite Order, much more rigorous than the Hieronymite Order, would not allow her as much freedom to write.
summarizes: “Los virreyes hacian y desfacian. Distribuían mercedes y otorgaban títulos y honores. Encomiendas, pensiones y reconocimiento . . .” (Chichilla Aguilar 53) ‘the viceroy made and took apart. They distributed graces and granted titles and honors. Encomiendas, pensions and acknowledgment . .’. The viceroy wielded much power and were able to give Sor Juana the necessary license to write.

**Summa**

The variety of themes and styles in Sor Juana’s work makes it impossible to study her works within a single, simple framework. As a writer, Sor Juana must have delighted in attempting different genres: her works range from various styles of poetry to drama to song. She wrote in Spanish, Latin, Nahuatl, and Portuguese. In this study, the categorization provided by the *Obras Completas*, edited by Alfonso Méndez Plancarte, will be followed. The whole of Sor Juana’s works, as provided and classified by Méndez Plancarte, will be utilized for many reasons. This collection has been utilized by most of Sor Juana’s critics as it is the first and foremost compilation of Sor Juana’s works. Because Sor Juana’s writings are mostly undated, there is no possible chronological classification. The lack of a chronological classification makes the classification by subject and style, as provided by the *Obras Completas*, the most helpful.\(^{10}\) In the Méndez Plancarte collection, the first of four volumes holds Sor

\(^{10}\) As a glaring proof of the lack of critical interest in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Méndez Plancarte’s 1951 work is still the most comprehensive collection of the nun’s writings. Though the classification utilized is very sensible, there are cases of arbitrary groupings and very subjective criticism. The division of the nun’s works into genres and subjects in this collection tends to hide the creative ability of the author and the diverse nature of the texts. In recent times, there seems to have been the unearthing of letters not previously known to be Sor Juana’s. These have yet to be incorporated in a comprehensive work. Also, the existing letters between Sor Juana and her confessors are not included. Méndez Plancarte seemed to have included only those works that were public in nature.
Juana’s lyric poetry, including secular and religious writings. The second volume consists of her Villancicos and Letras sacras, all of which are religious. The third volume is a collection of Autos y Loas, once again, a mixture of the secular and the religious. The fourth volume is made up of her prose pieces, which includes her letters, her comedies, and her Sainetes. A review of these collected works is the natural starting point for any study that will rely on the perception of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz as a professional writer. A quick examination of the whole of her works is sufficient to show the incredibly diverse spectrum of her literary production. The broad nature of her works, in turn, points to the importance of the various literary techniques that Sor Juana utilizes according to the genre, theme, and audience for a specific work. The conscious, premeditated nature of her writing comes to the forefront upon observing her manipulation of conventions for a desired effect and, therefore, allows for a study which assumes her writing to be calculated and far from improvised. Finally, by displaying the diversity of Sor Juana’s works, it becomes clear that she defies simple categorization. Sor Juana, if not seen through labels such as “mystic” or “lyric poet,” becomes a writer: capable of utilizing many differing approaches to create a rich and complex text worthy of study.

Lyric Works – the Secular and the Sacred

Of the secular pieces that fall in the first volume, at least 44, or one-fifth, were for the Marqueses de la Laguna alone. As the Viceroyos of México from 1680-1686, they
were a natural choice for patrons. They not only benefitted her by giving her protection from the mandates of the church, but also served as her conduit to the court in Madrid. Upholding the nature of an artist-patron relationship, Sor Juana wrote flattering, loving pieces to the Marqueses for every occasion. In this first volume of her works, there are also seven poems written for the Condes de Galve, two for the Bishop Don Payo Enríquez de Ribera, and at least two for the Marquesa de Mancera. There were thirty-two poems written as praise for certain acts or as birthday wishes for people other than her patrons. Given the wide spectrum of styles and issues in the poetry of Sor Juana, it is safe to assert, upon perusal of the varying, yet public, motivations given, that they were not meant as private meditation: the vast majority of her poems were written in epistolary style, designed to be seen by at least one other person.

As an artist, Sor Juana seems eager to test her ability to write convincingly from many different perspectives. In her poems, for example, she tackles the many different aspects of grief and love. In one poem, she poses as a widow grieving the loss of a husband. In another poem, she finds herself as a forlorn lover who appeases the jealousy of a lover with tears when rhetoric does not suffice. Of course, the classic

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role of a lover caught in a love triangle becomes the focus of yet other poems. These poems based on emotion, whether the emotion is love, sadness, or disillusionment, use the many traditional modes associated with their respective genres. It is within the category of poetry of praise for those in position of authority that we see many examples of Sor Juana’s love poetry. Her use of the literary tradition of the love poem will be studied in detail later. These poems have ignited a controversy in studies of her poetry: it appears that it doesn’t seem possible to some critics that a female author can write of what she has not experienced. Or, alternatively, what is doubted is that a woman can live her life without having had the experience of falling in love. These doubts as to the limitations of Sor Juana’s creative abilities compromise many of the existing studies of Sor Juana’s poetry. Only by stepping away from assumptions of her motivations and experiences and through the recognition of Sor Juana as a professional writer can her works be studied with more liberty. No longer is the text tied to an

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14 Poem 4, “Supuesto, discurso mio” (Cruz 1: 17), poem 166, “Que no me quiera Fabio, al verse amado” (Cruz 1: 288) (translation in Peden’s Poems, 185), poem 167, “Feliciano me adora y le aborrezco” (Cruz 1: 288), and poem 168, “Al que ingrato me deja, busco amante” (Cruz 1: 289).

15 Critics such as Mendez Plancarte show the tradition of tension between believing Sor Juana to be truly innocent of any amorous affairs (as an exemplary nun would have to be) and portraying Sor Juana as having had such experiences (as a woman who writes of love would have to have had). Following this tradition in the criticism, he states in his introduction to her Obras Completas, quoting previous critics who show the same doubt: “Maravillosa flor de discreción y hermosura, ‘es difícil que dejase de amar y de ser amada’, para expresarlo con el noble Don Marcelino; y la ‘humedad de lágrimas’ de su poesías amorosas torna plausible el ‘casto y misterioso amor’ que vislumbra Nervo, por más que –en lo absoluto– la sola intuición creadora explicaría su ‘legítimo acento de la emoción lírica’, notado por Menéndez y Pelayo, en los que el P. Calleja . . . llamó, nitidamente, ‘amores que ella escribe sin amores’ . . . ” (Mendez Plancarte Introducción xxviii) “Marvelous flower of discretion and beauty, ‘it is difficult that she not love and be loved,’ to express it with the noble Don Marcelino; and the ‘moisture of tears’ in her love poetry makes plausible the ‘chaste and mysterious love’ that Nervo reveals, as much as—in the absolute—only the creative intuition would explain her “legitimate accent in lyric emotion,” as noted by Menéndez y Pelayo, in what P. Calleja . . . neatly called “loves that she writes without loves” . . . ”. Only the Jesuit Calleja is free to confirm that she writes of love “without loves,” not doubting the professional nature of her writing.
unknown psychology with a limited vision but, instead, as in the case of other great writers, the curious are free to assume that an educated and informed mind is behind the written words. That assumption allows her texts to be seen as active participants in the literary world. The texts utilize, build upon, respond to, diminish, mimic, parody, and even feed upon other texts within the literary tradition.

The epistolary poems served a specific communicative task: they accompanied gifts and commented on public situations. Originating in response to specific social functions, these poems are even less likely to yield a realistic psychoanalytic reading. What can be studied, however, is the various rhetorical strategies that Sor Juana incorporates into the making of her public persona. These rhetorical strategies, including the rhetoric of subservience, indifference, and effusiveness, add up to what has been called a rhetoric of femininity.16

Twenty-five poems in this volume seem to be written purely for amusement. In light of other works written for the same reason, like the dramas written for court entertainment, the recreational orientation of these poems further emphasizes the professional nature of Sor Juana's literary production. These poems were written for the entertainment of her patrons and in some cases were used as entertainment at social gatherings. They were written neither for a specific person nor with a single motivating factor (such as previously seen in the epistolary poems, e.g., birthdays, Easter, etc.). Some of these are written with the purpose of being set to music during celebrations.

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16 As the term is utilized by Allison Weber in her 1990 book *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. Weber used the term when referring to Teresa of Avila. Sor Juana's version of the rhetoric of femininity is less based on the rhetoric of effusiveness than St. Teresa's.
while others serve as simple, often burlesque, social commentary. As the example that follows below proves, Sor Juana wrote poems of ridicule with little imaginable purpose other than to serve as amusement.

These poems, such as this one intended for a certain Leonor who believes herself to be beautiful (Cruz, poem 93, 1: 230), show an acute sense of humor and an interest in turning a good phrase. Sor Juana writes:

Que te dan en la hermosura
la palma, dices, Leonor;
la de virgen es mejor,
que tu cara la asegura.

No te precies, con descoco,
que a todos robas el alma:
que si te han dado la Palma,
es, Leonor, porque eres Coco. (1-8)

Dear Leonor, they’ve given you the palm for beauty, or so you say, but have no fear for your virtue, that face would save you any day. You sing your praises without qualm, to hear you tell it, men lose their wits: but if they’ve given you the palm, it’s from the date—for you’re the pits. (Peden Poems 155)

The translation by Peden, though effective in communicating the tone of the poem, loses much of the literal meaning. In the third and fourth lines, a literal translation would provide the readers with a better sense of the sharp nature of Sor Juana’s tongue. After stating that Leonor claims that she has received the palm (laurel) for Beauty, the nun retorts that “that of virgin would be better, / with that face you are sure of it!”, obviously implying that Leonor is too ugly to lure anyone into sin. In lines seven and eight the poem literally reads “but if they have given you the palm, / it is, Leonor,
because you are a Coconut.” Not only does this play off of the idea of palm trees giving coconuts, but it is biting criticism since “el Coco” translates as the boogeyman in certain areas of the Hispanic world. Though still paying attention to some very traditional themes (warning against excessive pride, playing with extremes, the notion of *desengaño*), Sor Juana takes an obviously spirited approach to a social encounter. Sor Juana does more, however, than just display her skill and wit: she logs a sharp complaint against the presumption and arrogance of beauty. It is important to call attention to her use of regionalisms and vernacular (such as “Coco”) in order to appreciate her willingness to be understood and appreciated by her immediate public.

In light of these poems, the professional nature of Sor Juana’s writing becomes clear: Sor Juana shows, through her varied choices in style, tone, and theme, her ability to write, on demand or not, on any given topic. Despite the convincing nature of the psychoanalytic Freudian readings of Sor Juana’s writing, it is hard, though quite amusing, to imagine anyone writing the poem lampooning Leonor’s looks out of some psychological or emotional need.

Included among such light-hearted, entertaining, socially minded poems, are much more serious poems dealing with pertinent social issues. These poems are not only meant to be entertaining, they are also designed to be social commentaries and

17 There is, in fact, a poem where Sor Juana states that she can not write on a topic, a special occasion, in the meter requested, and in the time limit given to her. Her poem “Señora: aquel primer pie” (Cruz, poem 144, 1: 276) serves as an explanation of why it is impossible to write what has been asked of her. Talking of the components of poems, as well as of grammar, Sor Juana explains that she is writing the explanation in order to not leave the page blank, “Perdonad, si fuera del / asunto ya desvario, / porque no quede vacio / este campo del papel” (18-21) ‘Forgive me if I stray / outside of the topic / so that this piece of paper / does not remain empty.’
participation within public discourse. Possibly her most famous lyric poem, “Hombres necios que acusáis” (Cruz, poem 92, 1: 228), is found in this category. Arguing against the double standard applied to men’s and women’s sexual behavior, one in which women are condemned for what men coerce them to do, this poem seems surprisingly daring for a nun even by modern standards. An acute criticism of men’s behavior toward women, this poem maintains its social relevance in today’s society.18 In this text, Sor Juana ridicules the accepted double standard by posing simple questions of logic and morality. She questions men’s “humor” and, in so doing, takes the poem’s issue away from questions of the ontological morality of women as compared to men and brings it into the realm of intelligence and sensible behavior. She challenges men by asking

¿Qué humor puede ser más raro
que el que, faltó de consejo,
el mismo empañá el espejo,
y siente que no esté claro? (21-24)

If knowingly one clouds a mirror
—was ever humor so absurd
or good counsel so obscured?—
can he lament that it’s not clearer? (Peden Poems 149)

By beginning her poem with such a simple example of an illogical act, utilizing the symbolic image of the mirror, Sor Juana makes the foundation for her argument questioning the wisdom underlying such a paradoxical double standard.

18 Speaking of this poem, in the introduction to Peden’s Poems, Stavans states “it is even today memorized in part by schoolchildren in México and throughout Latin America who grasp only a fragment of its overall meaning and thus simplify the poetess’s message. Its popularity might well be based, as Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell claim, on “the suppressed anger it reveals in women and the giddy catharsis it permits men”’ (xxiii). Regardless of the reason for its popularity, it is one of the few Golden Age poems widely known in Hispanic countries today.
This poem demonstrates her skills in rhetorical constructions, for the strength of her argument lies in the poet’s ability to ridicule the desires of men and to make men seem contradictory and whimsical in their behavior toward women. These characteristics, usually depicted as feminine in nature, have been key in the dismissal of women’s intellectual abilities. Sor Juana continues:

Opinión, ninguna gana;
pues la que más se recata,
si no os admite, es ingrata,
y si os admite, es liviana. (29-32)

There is no woman suits your taste, though circumspection be her virtue: ungrateful, she who does not love you, yet she who does, you judge unchaste. (Peden Poems 149)

With this stanza, Sor Juana emphasizes the impossibility of women’s position within this ridiculous set of rules. Given the unquestionable discrepancy of power between the sexes at the time this poem was written, this statement is to be seen as more than just a gloss concerning the amorous relationships between women and men. It amounts to a description of the precarious social environment in which women found themselves at a time in which women’s social position and economic stability were determined by their relationship to men.

The wisdom of this arrangement, of women depending on men for social power, is then questioned when the poet further questions men’s logic and their morality. Sor Juana accomplishes this by asking,

¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido
en una pasión errada:
la que cae de rogada,
Who does the greater guilt incur
when a passion is misleading?
She who errs and heeds his pleading,
or he who pleads with her to err?
Whose is the greater guilt therein
when either's conduct may dismay:
she who sins and takes the pay,
or he who pays her for the sin? (Peden Poems 151)

Here, men are seen as more than participants in the downfall of women; their role is
cmpared to the role of women and the question is asked: who is more blameworthy?

By asking on whom the bigger blame is to fall, the prostitute or the client, Sor Juana is
obviously defying a culture that has traditionally seen woman as the originator and
instigator of sin.

In the last line of the poem, in a reversal of the conventional Edenic view in
which woman is the cause of the downfall of man, Sor Juana addresses men by saying
"juntáis diablo, carne y mundo" (68) ‘adjoin flesh and world and devil’ (Peden Poems
151), likening men to Lucifer, the snake, tempting women into sin. Through this line of
reversal of characteristics, where it is men who behave as whimsical, illogical,
contradictory, yet forceful tempters (diabolical), Sor Juana questions the role of men in
society in general as well as the moral standards that allow men to behave in a morally
irresponsible manner. She also questions the condemnation of women when they buckle
under the pressure of this interminable temptation. The rhetorical strength of her
questioning, coupled with the fact that it is a woman, a virtuous nun above reproach who is writing, gives Sor Juana a formidable voice for public criticism.

The professional nature of Sor Juana’s writing is further displayed by the way the nun utilized her public voice. Sor Juana used the power that her voice provided not only to critique the society she lived in, but also to achieve more concrete gains. In the poems that follow, the most evident characteristic is the rhetoric of subservience that the poet uses with authority figures. These poems, composed for practical purposes, convey concrete desires in the social and legal realms. As a professional writer, Sor Juana does not hesitate to employ both her public voice and her literary and rhetorical skills in attaining her goals. In the first volume of her works, Sor Juana has two short poems directed to judges asking for favors in upcoming decisions. In one of these poems (Cruz, poem 116, 1: 252), Sor Juana does not bother to mention the question at hand but instead solely reminds the judge that she has asked it of him. She states,

Ese brevete mirad,
que es lo que he de suplicaros,
porque, y que he de cansaros,
os canse con brevedad.
El enfado perdonad
que os causo. Mas, sin embargo,
pues el negocio no es largo,
os suplico lo hagais luego (1-8)

Look upon that brief, / which is what I beg of you, / so that, since I am going to tire you, / I tire you with brevity. / Forgive the anger / that I cause. Regardless, / the business is not long / and I beg of you to tend to it soon.

In the first part of the poem, Sor Juana offers to tire with brevity and then goes on to ask forgiveness for bothering him. With these two acts Sor Juana insinuates a lower
social position for herself in comparison to the judge. Her rhetoric is composed of aggrandizing the figure of the judge while belittling her own. The wit displayed in the poem, a play on words (brief/breve - brevity/brevedad), makes her poem entertaining as well as communicative.

Clearly, Sor Juana accepts the opportunity offered by the needy situation to write with great wit and skill. The fact that she mentions neither the debated issue nor the desired result shows that Sor Juana had more than one communication with the judge on the matter. As a nun, Sor Juana was expected to help those who asked for her help. However, as a famed poet, Sor Juana had more recourse than the average nun did.

In the other poem directed toward a judge (Cruz, poem 117, 1: 252), Sor Juana asks the judge to have clemency for a widow who is in danger of losing her house. She states,

Juzgo, aunque os canse mi trato,  
que no os ofendo, en rigor,  
pues en cansaros, Señor,  
cumplo con vuestro mandato; (1-4)

I judge, even though my treatment of you may tire, / that I do not offend you in rigor / since in tiring you, Sir, / I fulfill your command.

Sor Juana makes her rhetoric clear by beginning her poem with the claim that she writes in order to please the judge. She belittles her own writing, for her first statement is that she is sure that she tires him with it. In this first stanza, she extracts herself from the possibility that she may be bothering the judge, or even trying to exert more power than propriety allows, by arguing that she writes him only on his behest.
Through this representation, where Sor Juana does not write out of self-interest but to please the judge, Sor Juana creates for herself a position of influence through subservience. Sor Juana continues to emphasize this point in the poem by stating:

\[y\text{ pues éste fué el contrato,}
\text{sufrid mis necias porfías}
\text{de escuchar todos los días}
\text{tan continuas peticiones, (5-8)}\]

And, well, this was the contract:/ suffer my stubborn persistence / by listening everyday / to my never-ending petitions.

Sor Juana refers to a contract between herself and the judge as one which dictates her action and one that she follows out of duty on a daily basis. By portraying her constant interaction with the judge as fulfillment of obligation, she dismisses the possibility of being accused of desiring to step outside of her proper limitations and attain more power than is proper. Sor Juana continues this rhetoric by declaring "que aquestas mis Rogaciones / se han vuelto ya Letanías" (9-10) 'that these, my Pleadings, / have already become Litanies.' Sor Juana here criticizes herself and her writings by stating that her petitions have become bigger than intended. However, she undauntedly continues on to make her case. The humor, coupled with subservience, in which Sor Juana cloaks her poems serves as protection from reproach.

Even within the crux of her argument, as is seen here, Sor Juana uses plays on words to make her argument seem palatable and light. Her use of the word casa (house, the subject of litigation) and descasada (either to be seen here as "de-housed" or "de-married") treats the case with wit, thus minimizing the importance of her request. Sor Juana states:
Una Viuda desdichada
por una casa pleitea;
y basta que Viuda sea,
sin que sea descasada.
De vos espera, amparada,
hallar la razón propicia
para vencer la malicia
de la contraria eficacia,
esperando en vuestra gracia
que le habéis de hacer justicia. (11-20)

An unfortunate widow / quarrels over a house; / it is enough that she is
widowed / without being de-housed [de-married]. / She expects from you
shelter, / to find reason favorable / to defeat the malice / of the contrary
cause; / she awaits upon your grace / that you should do her justice.

The minimization of both author and case is followed, in lines fifteen on, by an
emphasis on the judge, his virtues, and his powers. The judge, presented here as the
bearer of reason and of justice, is to have pity on the widow and, therefore, show
himself merciful. In this poem Sor Juana makes it clear that she makes it a habit to
ceaselessly petition the judge for whatever reason. She makes it clear, however, that it
is under his mandate (or contrato) that she takes the liberty to ask so much of him. All
of this rhetoric is applied without losing focus on the desired effect.

Judges are not the only dispensers of authority and justice that Sor Juana seeks
out in the role of the supplicant. Sor Juana also writes poem 125 (1:258) on behalf of a
captured Englishman to the Vicereine, Marquesa de la Laguna, asking for his liberty.
Because this poem is being written for her patron, Sor Juana takes a different approach
by being much more subservient and appeasing.19 The amount of flattery that she

19 The fact that Sor Juana wrote love poetry for the Marquesa de la Laguna has led some critics to
dispute the innocence of Sor Juana’s affection for her patron as well as her sexual orientation (Pfandl
among the first, the latest being Maria Luisa Bemberg in her 1990 film I, the Worst of All). Paz, however,
bestows upon her patron is rivaled only by her willingness to give up her own freedom in exchange for the freedom of the Englishman. She states:

Hoy que a vuestras plantas llego,  
con el debido decoro,  
como a Deidad os adoro  
y como a Deidad os ruego. (1-4)

Today as I arrive at your feet / with the proper decorum, / I adore you as a Deity / and as to a Deity I beg of you.

Sor Juana not only likens her patron to a deity, but also points out with her statement of *devido decoro* that there is a proper way in which to praise patrons. She continues by saying:

No diréis que el culto os niego,  
pretendiendo el beneficio  
de vuestro amparo propicio:  
pues a la Deidad mayor,  
le es invocar su favor  
el más grato sacrificio. (5-10)

You can’t say that I deny you worship, / as I am attempting to gain the benefit / of your kind shelter: / because for the greater Deity / petitioning a favor / is the most satisfying sacrifice.

---

sees Sor Juana’s poetry of praise as well within the limitations of propriety. Noting the incendiary nature of some of her love poetry written for the Marquesa de la Laguna, he states, “no faltará quien se pregunte: ¿por qué a la virreina y no al virrey? La primera –y tal vez única– respuesta que admite esta pregunta es la siguiente: habría sido escandaloso, dentro de la moral de su época (y aun de la nuestra), que Sor Juana dirigiese al marqués de la Laguna poemas en los que exaltase sus virtudes morales a la par que su encantos físicos. . . . La confusión entre erotismo y vasallaje aparece ya, según dije, en los primeros brotes de la poesía provenzal y fue perpetuado por los poetas del Renacimiento y de la Edad Barroca” (Paz 266) ‘there will be no lack of those who ask themselves: why [write] to the vicereine and not to the viceroy? The first —and possibly only— answer that the question allows is the following: it would have been scandalous, within the morality of her time (and even ours), for Sor Juana to devote to the Marqués de la Laguna poems where his moral virtues are exalted alongside his physical enchantments. . . . The confusion between eroticism and vassalage had appeared, as I said, in the first blooms of Provençal poetry and it was perpetuated by the poets of the Renaissance and of the Baroque.’

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The image of the patron as deity is further emphasized by Sor Juana’s assurance that she is faithful to the cult in her patron’s name. Keeping within the rhetoric of subservience and sacrifice, Sor Juana then turns to the plea of the Englishman. Sor Juana informs the patron that the greatest show of worship one can make is to ask a deity for favors.

By declaring, in lines eight through ten, that the biggest sacrifice possible to the highest of deities is to ask a favor, Sor Juana defines the patron-artist relationship, with its need and reliance, as tantamount to flattery. After assuring her patron’s greatness by needing her favor, later in the poem, Sor Juana states of the Englishman and of herself:

Dos cosas pretende aquí contrarias mi voluntad: para el Inglés, libertad, y esclavitud para mí; (21-24)

My will attempts / two contrary things: / freedom for the Englishman / and slavery for me.

In one brief stanza, Sor Juana presents the desired solution. Through the literary selflessness that she displays, Sor Juana makes the favor she is asking seem devoid of any personal gain. Resembling the rhetoric that she used toward the judges, Sor Juana belittles herself and her importance and, in so doing, emphasizes the position of power held by the recipient of the poem.

With her patron, however, Sor Juana extends the rhetoric of subservience to a greater consequence than with the judges: the nun gives herself to her patron as a slave. The loss of personal freedom is obviously the ultimate expression of the rhetoric of
subservience. The poet closes the text by comparing herself to the Englishman. The poem reads:

Contraria es la petición
de uno y otro, si se apura,
que él la libertad procura
y yo busco la prisión;
pero vuestra discreción
a quien nunca duda impide,
podrá, si los fines mide,
hecernos dichosos hoy,
con admitir lo que os doy
y conceder lo que él pide. (31-40)

The petition for one / is contrary to the other: / that he procures liberty / while I seek imprisonment; / but your discretion, / which never is impeded by doubt, / will be able, if you weigh the ends, / to make us happy / by accepting what I give / and conceding what he asks.

In the end of this poem, Sor Juana accentuates the faith that she has in her patron and her wisdom. After praising the discretion of her patron, the nun once again proposes her ideal solution for this dilemma. The way in which the poet phrases this solution shows she is confident that her patron will see the logic behind her solution. Sor Juana portrays herself to be completely at the bidding of her patron. Paradoxically, in the rhetoric that Sor Juana has presented, the nun is confirming her status as a servant by asking a favor, while her patron would be securing her status as master should she please the servant.

In the poems cited, there are two seemingly contradictory ideas: Sor Juana’s willingness to use her skills and fame in influencing social proceedings, and her extreme pronouncement of servitude and humility. True to Baroque form, this poem plays between a set of extremes, that of subservience and authority, with the desired
outcome being the servant persuading the master. Toward the judges, she is very careful to be charming: she asks a favor while flattering, demeaning her own social position, and being entertaining to the reader through the use of wit. To the Vicereine, her patron, she displays a more severe form of humility as she describes herself as a slave to the Marquesa. Simultaneously, while debasing herself, she proclaims the Englishman deserving of liberty, which, let it not be forgotten, is the true aim of the poem. Through this rhetoric of humility and servitude, Sor Juana has the liberty to participate in the public sphere. By belittling her individual worth and importance, she raises the value of her statements and assures her right to postulate.

It would be remiss, however, not to mention that Sor Juana gave herself as a slave to her patron on more than one occasion. In another poem (Cruz, poem 16, 1: 48), Sor Juana makes a case to the Marquesa de la Laguna for the acceptance of her servitude. She states:

\begin{verbatim}
. . . no quiero, Señora, 
que con piedad inhumana 
me despojeis de las joyas 
con que se enriquece el alma, 
sino que me tengáis presa; 
que yo, de mi bella gracia, 
por vos arrojaré mi 
libertad por la ventana. (33-40)
\end{verbatim}

. . . I do not want you, my lady, / with inhuman mercy / to take away the jewels / that enrich my soul. / Instead, [I want you to] hold me captive / for with my beautiful grace / I will throw my freedom / out the window for you.

Here Sor Juana states that service to the Vicereine gives all of the precious jewels that adorn the soul. Sor Juana voluntarily, according to the poem, chooses to give up her
individuality in order to serve her patron. It is impossible to say, in this way, that Sor Juana enslaved herself only when she needed a political favor. For the nun, enslaving herself was a habit.

Another way that Sor Juana’s status as a professional writer can be affirmed is through the study of texts that deal with her literary production and its reception. The stance that Sor Juana takes in these poems, though not indicative of personal beliefs on the topic, can be best described to be a rhetoric of indifference. Through poems dealing with such subjects as knowledge and writing, Sor Juana’s approach toward her public and her growing fame can be seen more clearly. Sor Juana, in a poem written to serve as prologue in the first collection of her works published (poem 1, 1:3), *Inundación Castálida*, admonishes the reader to be aware that she did not expect the poems to be published and, thus, wrote in a style that may not be pleasing to the reader. She states:

Estos Versos, lector mío,
que a tu deleite consagro,
y sólo tienen de buenos
conocer yo que son malos, (1-4)

These poems, Dear Reader, I give you with hopes your pleasure they ensure, though all that may speak well of them is that I know them to be poor. (Peden *Poems* 133)

With her first statement, Sor Juana acknowledges the fact that she has a public while assuring the reader of her humility. She begins her rhetoric of indifference by showing her humility through a classical phrasing. Echoing the teachings of Socrates in Plato’s
Apology, section 19, where wisdom is defined as the acknowledgment of ignorance, Sor Juana defines the good in her poems as being the acknowledgment that they are bad. In this way, her rhetoric toward her own writing follows the force of tradition.

Sor Juana continues her rhetoric of indifference and humility by stating that her poems do not deserve much attention. She states:

\[
\text{ni disputártelos quiero} \\
\text{ni quiero recomendarlos,} \\
\text{porque eso fuera querer} \\
\text{hacer de ellos mucho caso. (5-8)}
\]

I do not wish to argue them, nor of their worth give evidence, for such attention to these lines would seem to lend them consequence. (Peden Poems 133)

With this statement, Sor Juana begins a process that she will continue throughout the poem: she will distance herself from her poetry through indifference. This rhetoric of indifference is used as proof of her humility, safeguarding Sor Juana from accusations of pride and ambition, which would be the most unbecoming to a nun.

The indifference that Sor Juana displays is not solely directed at her own poetry, as is seen in the next stanza, but also at its reception by the reader in general. She states,

\[
\text{No agradecido te busco:} \\
\text{pues no debes, bien mirado,} \\
\text{estimar lo que yo nunca} \\
\text{juzgué que fuera a tus manos. (9-12)}
\]

---

20 According to Plato, Socrates states "I left thinking to myself, 'I am wiser than that man. Neither of us probably knows anything worthwhile; but he thinks he does and does not, and I do not and do not think I do. So it seems at any rate that I am wiser in this one small respect: I do not think I know what I do not'" (Plato 78).
nor do I seek your good esteem,
for after all, no one demands
you value what I never thought
would find its way into your hands. (Peden Poems 133)

In this statement, Sor Juana shows herself to be indifferent to the publishing of her poems and tells the reader that they themselves should be indifferent toward the poems. In fact, by stating that the reader should not value her poetry, Sor Juana is creating a situation in which the reader can only compliment the poetry. This rhetoric of indifference toward publishing, reception, and fame helps cloak Sor Juana with innocence.

Sor Juana shows a deep interest in convincing the reader that she is not writing poetry in order to gain fame and popularity. In her poems on the subject, she makes it clear that it is not personal ambition that drives her. In this poem, Sor Juana portrays her ability to write poetry as a natural, yet unwanted, gift. She states:

\[
y \text{que, quando los he hecho,}
\text{ha sido en el corto espacio}
\text{que ferian al ocio las}
\text{precisiones de mi estado;}
\text{que tengo poca salud}
y \text{continuos embarazos,}
tales, que aun diciendo esto,}
\text{llevo la pluma trotando.}(41-48)
\]

 besides which, when I wrote these lines,
they were composed in those rare fêtes
when leisure called a holiday
amidst the duties of my state;
for I suffer from ill-health,
my life, with obstacles is fraught,
so many, even as I write,
my pen is racing at a trot. (Peden Poems 135)
Sor Juana chooses to portray herself as an artist who does not take the time to think much over her works. The nun portrays herself as so caught up in her religious duties that she hardly has time to devote herself to writing. With this statement, she renders her writing a hobby, not to be considered a major preoccupation in her life. According to this poem, she is driven to write by inspiration and does not premeditate her texts or put too much interest in them. The inspiration, through this account, is violent as it comes quickly, demanding immediate transcription, one after the other.

It is interesting that she refers to the creative process as “embarazos” or pregnancies. In the Spanish, it is clear that these continuous pregnancies cause the ill health that she mentions. This raises the question of whether the ill health Sor Juana refers to is physical or psychological. Is she saying that she writes so quickly and so much in those brief moments that her mind is frayed? Sor Juana’s literary skills allow her to play with the poetic conventions, her “embarazos” keep the pen racing and her health frayed, all of which is stated to explain to her reader the little concern the nun has for her own writing.

The nun defines herself not only as spontaneous, but also as devoid of any ultimate goal. Of her preceding explanation for the lack of value of her poetry, she goes on to assert

Pero todo eso no sirve,
pues pensará que me jacto
de que quizás fueran buenos
a haberlos hecho despacio;
y no quieras que tal creas,
sino sólo que es el darlos
a la luz, tan sólo por
obedecer un mandato. (49-56)

But pay no heed to what I say,
lest you think I vaunt my rhymes,
suggesting that they would be good
had I but had sufficient time;
I would not have you so believe,
for their life, their imminence,
the cause for bringing them to light,
was dutiful obedience. (Peden Poems 135)

In a paradoxical move, Sor Juana states that she does not want the reader to believe that the poems would have been better had they been written slowly since they were written only because they were on demand. The poems, therefore, are both spontaneous and on demand.

This rhetoric is also found in her letter, Respuesta a Sor Filotea, where she states “Y, a la verdad, yo nunca he escrito sino violentada y forzada y sólo por dar gusto a otros; no sólo sin complacencia, sino con positiva repugnancia, porque nunca he juzgado de mí que tenga el caudal de letras e ingenio que pide la obligación de quien escribe” (Cruz 4:444) ‘And, in truth, I have written nothing except when compelled and constrained, and then only to give pleasure to others; not alone without pleasure of my own, but with absolute repugnance, for I have never deemed myself one who has any worth in letters or the wit necessity demands of one who would write’ (Peden Poems 11). It is this rhetoric, of obedient spontaneity, that allows Sor Juana to renounce any responsibility for her writings. Following this logic, the nun wrote in her spare time only those things which naturally and effusively came to her. However, she wrote furiously not out of her own volition, but instead, to please others. Sor Juana states that
her works would be better had she taken her time, yet, when left to her own devices, she has no interest in making them better. Her interest in writing is to fulfill her obligation to others, as it is also seen in her comment in this introductory poem to her collection.

Sor Juana ends her prologue by underscoring her rhetoric of indifference. Should the reader not find this preliminary poem suitable, states Sor Juana, she advises the reader to go no further in the book. She states,

\begin{verbatim}
Y a Dios, que esto no es más de
darte la muestra del paño:
si no te agrada la pieza,
no desenvuelvas el fardo. (61-64)
\end{verbatim}

Godspeed to you, all I do here is show a piece, but not the whole: so if you do not like the cloth, the bolt were better left unrolled. (Peden Poems 135)

With bold strokes, Sor Juana states her indifference, and therefore her independence, from the reader. Sor Juana handles this “unwanted” publication with a mixture of submissiveness and defiance. With humility she declares her poems unworthy. Despite this assurance of their lack of worth, however, she continually states her indifference to the kind of reception that they will receive. And after she has clearly stated that the poems, though of her own creation, are not of her own volition, she throws her indifference in the reader’s face.

Sor Juana plays with convention as she portrays herself as an effusive writer: as one who writes quickly and unthinkingly without premeditation. Sor Juana, by following this rhetoric of effusiveness, originates the idea that she naturally produces literature with little or no deliberation. Through her own rhetoric, her literary
production is to be seen as spontaneous expressions of her soul. Those critics who believe Sor Juana’s rhetoric of effusiveness believe her to write spontaneously and effervescently. To question the nun’s sincerity is to open the possibility of greater literary and rhetorical skill: Sor Juana becomes a much more literary figure when the socially appropriate statements of humility are questioned.

There is an introduction to this prologue (probably added with the first printing by either the poet herself, her patron, or the publisher) asserting that the publication of this collection of her poetry was done with Sor Juana “obedeciendo al superior mandato de su singular patrona, la Excelentísima señora Condesa de Paredes” (1:3) ‘Obeying the superior mandate of her unmatched patron the Most Excellent señora Condesa de Paredes.’ Through this statement, coupled with her own, Sor Juana is portrayed as completely powerless over the printing of her own poems. Though there is a command to publish, the nun’s reaction to this command is never noted. The implied message is that she is an unwilling participant in the publication of her works. This is never clearly stated, however, and is highly unlikely since a large amount of cooperation was received from Sor Juana. In writing the prologue, the nun shows herself to be in someway willing. However, it is in the best interest of Sor Juana not to be seen as desiring fame.

Moreover, what is easily overlooked in this matter is that though this was the first major publication of her works, a book-length collection, Sor Juana was already a very public and famous figure. When the Marqueses de la Laguna commenced their term as the viceroys of New Spain, Sor Juana was chosen to design one of the two
welcome arches that were to greet the viceroys upon entering the city. The written explanation that accompanied the arch, *El Neptuno Alegórico*, was well known and highly regarded. That she was chosen to construct an arch for this very important public celebration, along with the well-known ex-Jesuit Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, shows that she was not only distinguished as a religious and secular artist, but also considered one of the finest, if not the finest, in México. Her works, though not published in book form until later, were widely known as her pieces written for masses were published independently in booklet form and other works freely floated among those in the literary world as manuscripts.

The poem that Sor Juana wrote in gratitude for the generous compensation for the arch and *El Neptumo Alegórico* (poem 115, 1:251), clearly denotes an interest to appear at least grateful, if not ecstatic, upon the receipt of money for her work. Sor Juana states that the money she has received has compromised her muse. She writes:

Esta grandeza que usa  
conmigo vuestra grandeza,  
le está bien a mi pobreza  
pero muy mal a mi Musa. (1-4)

This greatness that / your greatness treats me with / is good for my poverty, / but bad for my Muse.

She continues this line of thought by stating the suspicion that rewarding her so greatly for her work could be seen as a way to keep her from writing. She states:

Perdonadme si, confusa  
o sospechosa, me inquieta  
el juzgar que ha sido treta  
la que vuestro juicio trata,
pues quien me da tanta plata
no me quiere ver Poeta. (5-10)

Forgive me if, either confused / or suspicious, it unsettles me / the
judging that this has been a trick / that which your judgement treats, /
because whoever gives me so much loot / does not want to see me as Poet.

Sor Juana’s statement that money impedes her ability to write serves the purpose of
showing Sor Juana’s willingness to render herself as a struggling artist whose
motivation in writing is the need for compensation. In this poem, Sor Juana clearly
presents her motivation for writing *El Neptuno Alegórico* as different from that
presented in other poems: it is neither obedience nor natural loquaciousness, but
economic need. Obviously, seeing the conflicting reasons she gives for her writing, as
they vary according to the nature of the occasion and the intended recipient, her works
are impossible to read in a clearly autobiographical manner.

In her texts, Sor Juana shows an awareness of the existing and possible criticism
that being a female writer could create. In some of her poems she tackles the issue and
refutes the assumptions made about her and her motivations. In her lyric poetry, she
deploys a multifaceted approach to defending her right to write as well as her
motivations in writing. She declares that her skills are a result of a natural talent that is
spontaneous. She portrays herself to be following the orders of others when she writes;
her works are not instigated by an individual desire to show her talent but, instead, from
her desire to please others. She also defies her status as a woman in a society where it
was deemed improper for women to participate in intellectual activities. None of these
statements detract from the fact that she behaves as a professional writer. She writes on
topics of interest to the reader, she writes for recompense, and she is always careful to produce within her works a sympathetic image of herself. In this way, Sor Juana guards herself from accusations which could eventually lead to censorship.

Sor Juana’s portrayal of her poetry as spontaneous is seen in various poems. She declares her works to be constantly coming to the surface in the poem that served as a prologue to *Inundación Castalida*, as already seen. But she also mentions this aspect in other circumstances. In an Easter greeting she sends the Marquesa de la Laguna (Cruz, poem 33, 1:92), she states:

\[
Y \text{ más, cuando en esto corre}  \\
\text{el discurso tan apriesa,}  \\
\text{que no se tarda la pluma}  \\
\text{más que pudiera la lengua. (17-20)}
\]

And what is more, when / this discourse runs so hurriedly, / the pen does not tarry / more than the tongue.

Sor Juana portrays her natural talent in writing poetry as one that allows her to write it as fast as she can think her ideas. This talent not only leads to spontaneity, she declares, it is in fact, irrepressible. Through a classic anecdote, Sor Juana presents her talent as one she is unable to hide. She states,

\[
Si \text{ es malo, yo no lo sé;}  \\
\text{ sé que naci tan poeta,}  \\
\text{que azotada, como Ovidio,}  \\
\text{suenan en metro mis quejas. (21-24)}
\]

If it is wrong, I do not know; / I know that I was born such a poet, / that when beaten, like Ovid, / my moans sound in meter.

The relentless nature of her poetic inclinations is brought out through a self-comparison to Ovid. By comparing herself to a classic master, she not only justifies her desire and
volition to write but also presents herself as one who is meant, through destiny, to write regardless of gender. This argument, designed to bolster her right to write, functions for some critics as a prompt to see her writing as she describes it: spontaneous, irrepressible, and effusive.

Sor Juana defies her social function as a woman in order to liberate herself from the role that women were expected to play in society. In a poem meant as a response to a man who sent her *barros* telling her to turn herself into a man (Cruz, poem 48, 1:136), Sor Juana completely negates her role as a woman in the eyes of society. Sor Juana states:

> Yo no entiendo de esas cosas; 
> sólo sé que aquí me vine 
> porque, si es que soy mujer, 
> ninguno lo verifique. (93-96)

> I have no knowledge of these things, 
> except that I came to this place 
> so that, if true that I am female, 
> none substantiate that state. (Peden Poems 141)

Sor Juana openly states that her purpose in entering a cloister is to escape her role as a traditional woman. In the convent, she lives in a state where her gender remains unverified and unimportant. Here, she begins her argument in defense of her intellectual interests despite her gender. Sor Juana claims that she is gender-free due to the religiously oriented negation of her body.

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21 He sent her *bucanos* which are pieces of clay in a specific shape. Though I do not know what the shape is, I can only imagine that it is of interest to the situation.
Therefore, being a gender-free soul within a woman's physical body, her intellectual interests cannot be seen as improper. She continues to argue this point by relying on classical authorities to uphold her denial of gender due to her denial of gender-based social functions. She bases her argument on semantics when she states:

Y también sé que, en latin,
sólo a las casadas dicen
uxor, o mujer, y que
es común de dos lo Virgen. (97-100)

I know, too, that they were wont
to call wife, or woman, in the Latin
uxor, only those who wed,
though wife or woman might be virgin. (Peden Poems 141)

By finding precedent in Latin, she upholds her claim that she is really not a woman, since she does not serve society as a woman. The defining of gender in accordance to the function the body serves in society helps Sor Juana utilize her position as a nun to liberate herself from the constraints placed upon women. Simultaneously, this movement away from the body and its functions is a trope commonly found in the writings of the time.\(^\text{22}\) Sor Juana stands as a part of tradition in her rebellion against the traditional role assigned to women. By choosing the contemplative life, Sor Juana denies her physical existence and places her soul in the position to defy gender and its limitations. This issue will be further discussed in the chapter dealing with the Scholastic Tradition.

\(^{22}\) Sor Juana, in her poetry dealing with the separation of body and soul, is participating in a poetic tradition. The theme of negation of the body can be seen in many of the poems by other great poets of the Golden Age of Spain as well as English poets.
Sor Juana chastises the gentleman to whom she is responding by letting him know that it is not correct for him to have seen her as a woman. Her logic is that since she is not to serve anyone as a woman, she is not to be seen as a woman at all. This logic places the man, who has criticized her for writing when it is improper for a woman, at fault for seeing her as a woman in the first place. The act of impropriety, therefore, is committed by him. She says,

Con que a mi no es bien mirado
que como a mujer me miren,
pues no soy mujer que a alguno
de mujer pueda servirle; (101-104)

So in my case, it is not seemly
that I be viewed as feminine,
as I will never be a woman
who may as woman serve a man. (Peden Poems 141)

Through this logic, Sor Juana can safely defy the limitations normally placed on women. Her claim to lack gender and sexuality, which is also present in her love poetry, serve her as a license to explore areas commonly denied to women. Any criticism she receives on this front, as this case shows, Sor Juana can then turn on the critic: through this rhetoric, she shows the criticism to be a lack of correct perception on the part of the person who criticizes. In this way, she portrays herself innocent of transgressions.

Sor Juana asserts her theological reasoning to separate her identity from her gender. She states:

y sólo sé que mi cuerpo,
sin que a uno u otro se incline,
es neutro, o abstracto, cuanto
sólo el Alma deposite.(105-108)

I know only that my body,
not to either state inclined,
is neuter, abstract, guardian
of only what my Soul consigns. (Peden Poems 141)

Finally, Sor Juana ultimately denies her identity as a woman by emphasizing her
identity as a nun. She points out that she has chosen a religious life and that her body
serves none of the functions that women’s bodies serve in society: her body is
exclusively to be perceived as the repository of the soul.

The rejection of her body, especially of the physical aspects that define her as
female, plays a major role in her claim to the right to write. Sor Juana further distances
herself from her feminine body by openly rejecting the procreative functions of women.

She states in a poem (Cruz, poem 49, 1: 143):

Lo que me ha dado más gusto,
es ver que, de aquí adelante,
tengo solamente yo
de ser todo mi linaje.
¿Hay cosa como saber
que ya dependo de nadie,
que he de morirme y vivirme
cuando a mí se me antojare? (129-136)

What has pleased me the most, / is to see, that from here on, / I only have
myself / as my whole lineage. / Is there anything like knowing / that I
depend on no one, / and that I am to live and die / when it suits me?

This is a poem written as a response to a poem from a man. This time the poem to
which Sor Juana responds was written in praise of her poetry. While belittling her
writing and skill, Sor Juana takes the opportunity to revel in her independence and the

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non-traditional role that she created for herself. She dismisses childbearing and the role of women in the family as things that would sadden her and leave her unsatisfied.

Despite the personal nature of these statements, it is necessary to note that they are public statements meant to defend her choice of profession against criticism. They are responses to public attention and close scrutiny. Instead of being public confessions, these are adopted stances designed to protect her freedom to write. The adopted stances, however, are not necessarily devoid of additional meaning, either poetic or literal. The issue of family and lineage will be discussed in detail in the chapter on the Scholastic Tradition.

There are twenty-three religious poems in the first volume of Sor Juana's work. There seem to be differing motivations for these works. A set of six poems written for a celebration taking place in a monastery provides an interesting example of the conflicting interests that Sor Juana has as a professional writer who needs to please and appease her public. All six of these poems were designed to be put to music. Two of these poems, the first and the third, are counted as part of the twenty-three poems which are religious in nature.\(^2\) The other four poems in this series took the opportunity to praise the dignitaries present at the celebration.\(^3\) Through this set of poems, the

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\(^2\) The first part, entitled "Introducción," poem 64, "Al privilegio mayor" (Cruz 1: 177) is written in praise of the feast. The third of the set, is entitled "Española," poem 66, "Pues la excelsa, sagrada María" (Cruz 1: 182) and is written in praise of the Virgin Mary. Regardless of the religious context of these poems, both mention and praise the viceroys.

\(^3\) These poems, poem 65 "A las excelsas, soberanas plantas" (Cruz 1: 181) is written in praise of Cerda, Marques de la Laguna, poem 67 "La divina Lysi" (Cruz 1: 183), poem 68 "Hoy, que las luces divinas" (Cruz 1: 184), and poem 69 "A la deidad más hermosa" (Cruz 1: 186) are all written in praise of Lysi, the Marquesa de la Laguna.
differing and varied concerns that influenced the nun’s writing can be assessed.

Without doubting the veracity of her personal faith, since there is no reason to do so, the union of her religious and secular interests makes it clear that her participation in religious writing is also done with an eye for personal gain, whether it is economic or political.

The last poem found in the first volume of her complete works, *El Sueño*, is probably Sor Juana’s most widely studied poem. As her only poem which has been considered mystic, it has garnered more interest than any of her other works, with the possible exception of her prose letter in self-defense, *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*. This poem has enabled critics to situate Sor Juana in the mystical tradition along with other female writers such as Teresa de Avila and Hildegard of Bingen. Unlike these other writers, however, Sor Juana does not claim to enter a state of altered consciousness in order to write. It has been noted that throughout her poem, there seems to be more reason and logic than mysticism.26 Also differentiating Sor Juana

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23 More critical works on *El Sueño* include very detailed analysis such as: “La Situación Enunciativa del Primero Sueño” (Perelmuter Pérez, Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos 11 [1986]: 185-91), “Reminiscences of Góngora in the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” (Eunice Joiner Gates, *PMLA* 54 [1939]: 1041-58), “Una Minucia en El sueño de Sor Juana: ¿Almone o Alcione?” (Manuel Corripio Rivero, *Abside* 29 [1965] 472-81), as well as broader, more comprehensive texts such as Georgina Sabat Rivers’s *El Sueño* de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Tradiciones literarias y originalidad, Pamela Kirk’s *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Religion, Art, and Feminism*, George H. Tavard’s *Juana Ines de la Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology*, Alfonso Méndez Plancarte’s *Juana Inés de la Cruz: El sueño*, and many others.

26 Octavio Paz refers to this poem as “poesía del intelecto ante el cosmos” (470) ‘poetry of the intellect before the cosmos.’ Ramón Xirau notes that the aspects of Sor Juana’s religious poetry “habrán de conducirnos al borde de un tema crucial: el del discutido misticismo de Sor Juana; misticismo solamente posible y aun probable en los últimos años, cuando Sor Juana entra en el silencio. De hecho, en la totalidad de la obra sacra de Sor Juana no se encuentra aquella intención contemplativa que encontramos siempre y en todo momento en Santa Teresa, San Juan de la Cruz o fray Juan de los Ángeles” (62) ‘are to take us to the edge of a crucial theme: the disputed mysticism of Sor Juana; a mysticism possible, and even probable, only in her last years when Sor Juana enters into silence. In fact, missing in the totality of the religious
from writers of mystic poetry is that Sor Juana never limits herself to mystical writings. Not only is *El Sueño* the only work that has ever been placed under this category, it is placed under this rubric with some contention. Some refer to *El Sueño* as “a strictly personal didactic poem, which falls into no specific genre” (Tavard 10).

**Sacred Works**

The second volume of Méndez Plancartes’s *Obras Completas* consists of Sor Juana's religious poetry. All of the 150 songs and poems in this volume were “ordered,” and rewarded, by the church. Of all of her poetry, this collection is the most organized: it has been possible to ascertain for what year and religious celebration the poem was written as they were printed in accordance to the feast day and year they were read. Each collection of poetry, whether for Easter, Christmas, or any other commemoration, dealt with the religious as well as social aspects for that specific celebration. As these poems were requested with the intention of being read as a part of a mass, Sor Juana incorporated into these religious poems entertaining aspects (such as slang terminology and even humor) to make them more palatable for the congregation. An important consideration is that Sor Juana, during these very public occasions, was unlikely to diverge from or challenge the accepted theology and ideology of the Church. Also of great importance is that the Church, through an individual bishop or parish, would ask her to write poetry for the masses, showing that her writing had active support within the infrastructure of the Catholic Church in México.

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works of Sor Juana is that contemplative intention that we always find at all times in Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, or Father John of the Angels."
Sor Juana, writing under the order of the Catholic Church at the time of the Inquisition, was obviously not guilty of writing anything that could be considered a heresy. In these poems, she never questions the beliefs of the Catholic Faith or the Catholic Church in any way. She uses her public voice to uphold and revere the theology and the institution of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. This exaltation of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is achieved in her poetry through a coherence and unity with the veneration of the theological beliefs of the Christian Faith. In one of the poems attributed to her, she uses the names of popes and saints to aggrandize the history of the Church. She states:

Fué en sus Papales hechuras
Pedro el primer Bonifacio,
y en su inculpable gobierno
el Inocencio, el Urbano.
   Al temple del Pescador
   bien en su red han pintado,
como Celestinos pejes,
Benedictos Nicolaos.
   Omito los otros nombres
peregrinos de Romanos;
   que fué cada uno un San Pedro,
o no fueron Padres Santos. (Cruz, poem lxxxi, 2:351, 25-36)

He was in his Papal figure / Peter the first Bonifacio, / and in his unblemished governance / the Innocent, the Urbano. / With the temper of the Fisher / they have painted in his net, / like Celestine fish, / Benedictos Nicolaos. / I omit other names / of Roman pilgrims; / each was a Saint Peter, / or they were not Holy Fathers.

In her poem the treatment of the famed Popes of the past denotes their presence as mythical and historical figures, but also reinforces the theological identity of the Pope as the re-embodiment, and not just a replacement, of Saint Peter. Through this poem,
Sor Juana celebrates the Catholic Church and not just the Catholic Faith. The nun emphasizes the holy nature of those who bring the word of God to Earth and, in so doing, supports the Church as an institution.

Her constant and unwavering support in her religious writing for the Catholic Church and its organization reduced all contentions against her license to write into arguments entirely based on her gender. The fact that she was never under any type of official investigation by the Holy Office of the Inquisition certifies that the content of her poetry was never anything but orthodox. The challenge that she presented to parts of the Mexican Catholic Church, not to the whole, would have been derived solely from who she was and not from what she wrote. As it was, the criticism that she received was directed against her writing on secular themes.

While safely maintaining herself within the realm of accepted dogma, Sor Juana provided a pro-woman subtext for her religious writing: the adoration of the Virgin Mary. By emphasizing the importance of Mary in the Christian faith, Sor Juana attempted to reconcile her faith and her gender. This aspect of her religious poetry, which is frequently found in Sor Juana's writing, is neither subversive nor original. The tradition of poetry in honor of Mary was very strong in Spanish literary circles of the time. Sor Juana's Marianism is clear in the poems written for the masses in celebration of the Conception and of the Ascension. Sor Juana, however, accepts every opportunity to depict Mary's virtues and importance in an uncharacteristic light.

In a poem in dedication to a cloister and a church in the honor of Saint Bernard, Sor Juana compares the goodness of St. Bernard to that of Mary. She states that
Maria no es Dios, pero es
quien más a Dios se parece;
y Bernardo tanto crece,
que a los Dos se ha parecido (Cruz, poem 349, 2: 211, 7-10)

Mary is not God, but / she is the one who resembles God the most; / and
Bernard so grows / that he resembles them both.

Through this phrasing, Sor Juana makes Mary the standard against which the holiness
of all human beings should be measured: the goodness of St. Bernard lies in his likeness
to Mary. Mary, in this poem, is presented as the person who is most like God. The
intellectual consequence that Sor Juana derives from this statement will be studied in
greater detail later. It suffices to say now that Sor Juana’s use of the Virgin Mary helped
the nun transcend, if only in her writings, the artificial and traditional boundaries
between the genders and their abilities. Sor Juana’s treatment of the Virgin Mary will
be studied in detail in the chapter on *Hagia Sophia*.

Further enhancing the view of Sor Juana as a professional writer, it is clear that
in the poems that the nun created for use in masses that she was aware of her public and
cared about the poems’ reception. The poet was cognizant of the fact that her poems
would be read to a great number of people during a religious ceremony and so
attempted to make her poems accessible, entertaining, instructive, and dogmatic. In
sharp contrast to some of the language and concepts that one can find in her *lírica
personal*, the language that predominates in her religious writing is relaxed and
inclusive. Through the use of humor, dialects, and dialogue, Sor Juana makes her works
functional for the Catholic Church as well as painless for the congregation.
Poems in the form of dialogues and arguments are found throughout her collection of religious writings meant for public celebrations. These poems, probably read by two or more voices, provided an aspect of performance to the mass. Designed to garner attention through arguments and song, these poems were also meant to complement the sermon in content. In a long poem dedicated to the Ascension of Mary, there is a portion entitled Juguete (toy) where the dates of the Ascension and the Incarnation and their differences are reviewed. This was accomplished through the use of a three-person dialogue where two of the characters are arguing over the dates.

Speaking of the Ascension, she writes

3.–A quince de Agosto fué.
2.–¡No fué!
3.–¡Sí fué!
2.–¡No fué!
3.–De la Iglesia la alegría
la celebra en ese día,
y es creerlo así, razón. (Cruz, poem 311, 2: 160, 47-51)

3.–It was the fifteenth of August.
2.–Was not!
3.–Was too!
2.–Was not!
3.–The Church celebrates / the joy on this day, / and it is reason to believe it so. 27

In this poem, there is a dynamic which is jovial and entertaining while enlightening the hearer of the proper date. The chorus in this poem is composed of the two voices arguing ("Was not! Was too!") while the poem itself gives a simple lesson on the dates

27 The numbers besides the text denote the speaker in action.
of two major celebrations. The poem functions as a clarification of any possible confusion between the two dates while providing entertainment to the congregation.

Through this performative aspect, Sor Juana blurs the boundary between poetry and drama. Sor Juana utilizes a technique in her poetry that she also uses in the plays written for court entertainment. She uses many voices, with quick repartee, alternating, usually in disagreement, in various of her religious poems. Many of the religious poems are written in a segmented format in which each fragment has a different tone and style while maintaining the same theme. In some of these multi-part poems, Sor Juana, in an omniscient voice, introduces characters that then have speaking roles in other segments.

In a particular poem celebrating Christmas, there is one part in which four roles are utilized to argue whether it is water, fire, air, or earth that comes to the aid of Jesus as a child. It reads:

1.-Pues al Niño fatigan sus penas y males, y a sus ansias no dudo que alientos le falten, ¿quién le acude? 
2.-¡El Fuego! 
3.-¡La Tierra! 
4.-¡El Agua! 
1.-¡No, sino el Aire! (Cruz, poem 283, 2: 112, 33-38)

1.-Well, the Child is tired / by his sorrows and ills, / and I do not doubt that with his anxieties / he is short of breath. / Who aids him?
2.-Fire!
3.-Earth!
4.-Water!
1.-No, it is Air!

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This format, of different voices interacting in broken lines, is seen again in many of the other religious poetry and in her plays for the Viceregal Court. The technique applied is clearly designed to grab the attention of the listener though the themes may differ according to the celebration for which the work was written.

Sor Juana also utilized dialect to make her addition to the masses more lively. There are many poems that use a dialect, either Indian or black islander, to celebrate the religious holidays. It is of interest to note that in the first volume of the *Obras Completas*, what is termed as her *lirica personal*, there are no poems written in any dialect. Because Sor Juana does not use dialects in order to write most of her poetry, but she does utilize dialect in the poetry which is going to be publicly read/performed at masses, it is safe to conclude that this is one technique among many designed to suit the specific audience for which the work is composed. Obviously, Sor Juana was very aware of her public and wanted to entertain as well as convey a message. Once again, the professional nature of the works can be seen in their design.

The use of the black islander dialect in praise of the Virgin Mary shows an inclusiveness within the faith while entertaining with the use of culturally accepted stereotypes. In a multi-ethnic, multi-racial environment like México City, the inclusion of peripheral groups, through the use of nontraditional Spanish or the use of regional vocabulary and language, must have enhanced the interest of the spectator. In a poem

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28 This technique can be seen in the introductory *Loa* of *Los Empeños de una Casa* where Música (Music), Mérito (Merit), Fortuna (Fortune), Diligencia (Diligence), and Acaso (Maybe) are found arguing in the fourth scene (Cruz 4: 12-16). This technique is also found in other *Loas* and in some of her religious plays.
written for the Ascension ceremonies in 1679, a segment is found written in black islander dialect. Two islanders, in this poem, are discussing the Virgin Mary and her virtues in a dialogue format. One of them likens the mother of God to a slave who has received her freedom. Sor Juana writes:

1.-Ésa si qui se nomblaba
ecrava con devoción,
e un turo culazón
a mi Dioso servíaba:
y polo sel buena Ecrava
le dieron la libertá.
¡Ha, ha, ha! (poem 258, 2: 72, 64-70)

1.-That one indeed did name herself / a devoted slave / and with all her heart / she served my God: / and because she was a good slave / they gave her freedom. / Ha, ha, ha!

Sor Juana shows her characters interpreting religion and religious figures through their own terms, experiences, and reality. Sor Juana portrays the experiential aspect of understanding Christian Faith as core to religious practices (as the performance of these poems in masses displays). She depicts the Catholic Faith as inclusive of all classes of society, all races, and all cultures. True to Baroque form, the inclusion of slang

29 Sor Juana, like most people of her time, did not always rise above the commonly held racial prejudices and practices. Though she has works which openly criticize the colonizing role of the Spaniard in México and the mistreatment of the non-white population, it is important to note that she herself had a slave throughout most of her life in the convent.

30 Stavans, in his introduction to Peden's Poems, sees it differently. Of the dialects that she depicts, she states, "it makes fun of the way blacks and Indians react to the ascension of the Virgen de Guadalupe...the criollo intelligentsia of seventeenth-century New Spain denigrated indigenous folklore" (xxxii). Though it is true that there was much disrespect in the way the criollo treated indigenous classes, there is no reason to believe that Sor Juana is participating in this by depicting Mary as a slave who gained her freedom. It is more likely, seen in relation to her respectful use of Nahuatl and of her acceptance of cultural differences as seen in her other writings, that Sor Juana is merely taking into consideration the experiential aspects of faith and religion. This image, though given in dialect, is not ridiculed within the scope of the poem. The use of dialect alone is not necessarily denigrating.
displays the successful coexistence of intellectual extremes: theology and ignorance. The meeting of the two extremes creates an openness, "and such openness," states a critic, "we may conclude, is the sign of a continuing tradition in which popular idiom and extreme sophistication are not felt to be incompatible—a pattern we shall find repeated in other seventeenth-century poets, from Quevedo to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" (Terry 151). By taking other races into consideration, Sor Juana did nothing more than apply tradition to her environment.

It is clear to see that Sor Juana is interested in creating an image for the Catholic Church of inclusion and acceptance during a time in history when it is both a colonizing faith and the faith of the colonizer. The poet attempts to portray the peripheral populations as being able to find a niche within the Catholic Faith by expanding the scope of traditional celebrations by including dialects in her poetry and, therefore, the Other in the faith. In the following poem, Sor Juana portrays "un Negro que entró en la Iglesia, / de su grandeza admirado" (poem 241, 2: 39, 5-6) 'a black who entered a church, amazed by its grandeur,' who is in a state of confusion about his place in the Catholic Faith. The black man, referring to the Virgin Mary and the racial prejudice of his time, states

La otra noche con mi conga
turo sin durmi pensaba,
que no quiele gente pliesta,
como eya so gente branca. (21-24)

The other night, with my woman from Congo, / I lay awake thinking / that she [the Virgin Mary] does not want black people / since she herself was white.
Sor Juana tackles the theme of racism within religion without meandering. She develops a character that has doubts about his faith based on the prejudice society inflicts upon him on a daily basis. This doubt in the Church and its teachings is immediately followed by a denunciation of the inhuman way blacks are made to feel. Sor Juana’s black character states: “¡pues, Dioso, mila la trampa, / que aunque negro, gente somo, / aunque nos dici cabaya!” (26-28) ‘Well, God, look at the trap! / Though we are black, we are people, / though they call us horses!’ This statement, depicting an abuse so prevalent and innate to the situation, shows how ill treatment can lead to a breakdown of religious belief. For Sor Juana, blacks and their dialect were not for entertainment: the black population and their troubles were emphasized in order to show how mundane troubles can make a soul doubt the veracity of its faith. Sor Juana utilizes the black man, in this case, as a universal figure to which the whole of the audience can relate. The black character in this poem comes to symbolize any soul which in a time of trouble has come to question its faith in God. She also uses her public voice to bring the issue of racial inequality to the attention of the congregation and openly question its morality.

The poet resolves this situation by showing the black character reflecting upon his own feelings and declaring that they have misled him. Though the character never reconciles himself with the abuse that he refers to, keeping the poem from being apologetic in nature, he does reconcile himself to the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church by stating that his doubt, or mistrust of religion, though based on the
treatment given to him by society, was an evil thought incited by the devil. In a moment of self-questioning, he asks himself

\begin{quote}
Mas ¿qué digo, Dioso mío?
¡Los demoño, que me engaña,
pala que esé mulmulando
a esa Redentora Santa! (29-32)
\end{quote}

But, my God, what am I saying? / The demon deceives me so, / for me to be murmuring / to that Redeeming Saint!

This closing, while it is the only ending appropriate for a religious poem, does not leave the speaker better off in his physical, temporal world. What it accomplishes is the rejection of the idea that racist practices exist in the eyes of the Virgin Mary and, therefore, God. Though the cruelty of the time is undeniable and her critique of it stands untempered, according to Sor Juana, Faith stands above it all.

Sor Juana, like other traditional writers, wrote in Latin also. Unlike other traditional writers, however, Sor Juana wrote in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of México. Sor Juana has poems entirely in Nahuatl, poems that have Nahuatl words, and poems that have the format of the *tocotin*, a traditional indigenous song of the area.31 One of Sor Juana's poems, written to be performed at the mass of Mary's Ascension in 1676, is extremely traditional in content, has a part written in Nahuatl which follows the rhyme pattern and meter of a *tocotin*. Those who understood the poem would be of the Mexica population, and either first or second generation Christians.

Notwithstanding, Sor Juana does not insinuate in any way anything that would detract

\[31\] This name, *tocotin*, was an onomatopoeic word for the rhythm that the Spaniards heard; “the Spaniards called this kind of song a *tocotin*, from the triple meter of the music; in Nahuatl it was a *netotlitchiti*. The rhythm was created by two different drums and several other instruments” (Tavard 13).
from the orthodoxy of the poem or the dignity of the audience (which in this case, as
limited by language, would be specifically those Mexicanas found in the congregation).

Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the poem states:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ma\ mopampantzinco \\
in\ mooayolcatintin, \\
in\ itla\ pohpoltin, \\
tictomacehuizque.
\end{align*}
\]

(Cruz, poem 224, 2: 17, 106-109)

Alfonso Méndez Plancarte, basing his work on a literal translation provided by Ángel
M. Garibay, gives the following as a translation into Spanish:

\[
\begin{align*}
Tus\ pobres\ devotos \\
seremos,\ felices, \\
por\ tu\ mediaci\on \\
dignos\ de\ servirte.
\end{align*}
\]

(Cruz, 2: 365, 25-28)

Your poor devotees / we will happily be; / by your mediation / we will be
worthy of serving you.

Many of the themes touched upon in this poem liken it to the many others
commemorating the Virgin Mary. However, this poem covers an unusually broad range
of styles and interests. As noted, there is a section written in Nahuatl (lines 82-117), but
there is also a section written in black islander slang (lines 33-73), and two transitional
sections are written in standard Spanish (lines 1-32 and 74-81). All of it is written with
a coherent and traditional theme: the celebration of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary.

In her poetry, Sor Juana presents a mixture of worlds and interests. Her
inclusion spans not only cultures, but different social classes within the same culture. It
is important to note that the Latin used in her poetry in this category is not meant to be
exclusive or elitist: at the time, masses were being said in Latin and even the illiterate
portions of the population could be expected to understand some of the phrases utilized.\textsuperscript{32} (This is not always the case, however, with the Latin that she applies in other media; it seems that in her non-religious writings, she is not above using Latin as a demonstration of higher erudition and, equally, of poking fun at those who want to show higher erudition.\textsuperscript{33})

The religious writing of Sor Juana shows the elaborate nature of Sor Juana’s motivations for writing. Sor Juana writes the religious poetry to fulfill a command from the Church, expecting recompense, and with an obligation to educate as well as delight the congregation.\textsuperscript{34} The poems were meant to be part of a ritual celebration: they needed to be dogmatic and participate in the education and direction given to the congregation. At the same time, there is an obvious attempt on behalf of the poet to be entertaining and inclusive in worship. This is complicated by the fact that at the same time that members of the Church asked her to write these poems, she was criticized by other church members for writing.

\textsuperscript{32} In a poem for St. Peter (Cruz, poem 249, 2: 58), Sor Juana mixes everyday terminology (like “¡Quiquiriqui!” a rooster’s cry) with simple Latin phrases (“Sancta Sanctorum” and “Thesaurus Verborum”) and references to classic figures (such as Aeneas).

\textsuperscript{33} In poem 241 (Cruz 2: 40), Sor Juana states that a “Bachiller afectado / que escogiera antes ser mudo / que parlar en Castellano” (38-40) ‘a pretentious baccalaureate / who would rather be mute / than speak in Spanish’ spoke utilizing many Latin phrases. The responses that he received from “un bárbaro que encontró” (43) ‘a savage he found’ are complete nonsense, making for an interesting and comical part of a poem dedicated to St. Peter. To the learned’s pronouncement of “Hodie Nolascus divinus / in Caelis est collocatus” (45-46), the savage replies “Yo no tengo asco del vino, / que antes muero por tragarlo” (47-48) ‘I am not sickened by wine, / that I would die to drink it.’

\textsuperscript{34} This, of course, is following the classical teachings of Horace who, in his \textit{Art of Poetry}, stated that the purpose of works should be to delight the senses as well as instruct the mind.
Autos y Loas

The third volume of Sor Juana's collected works consists of *Autos y Loas*.

Surviving are three of Sor Juana's *autos*: *El Divino Narciso, El Mártir del Sacramento, San Hermenegildo,* and *El Cetro de José*. These religious dramas, performed at Church functions, are much like Sor Juana's religious poetry: they do not deviate from the accepted teachings of the Catholic Church while, at the same time, they strive to be original and entertaining within the provided guidelines. There is a strong Spanish tradition of *autos* which is especially seen in the works of Calderón de la Barca.35 *Loas* originated as the prologues to plays, maybe as a single monologue, or a *saludo*.36 By the time that Sor Juana was writing, *loas* had liberated themselves from dramas. They could, or could not, be related thematically to the plays that they preceded, and in fact, they did not have to precede a play at all. They came to signify a type of speech, like the loose *loas* that Sor Juana wrote commemorating the birthday of the King.

35 This strong Spanish tradition can be studied in more detail in the works of Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera y Leirado (*Catalogo bibliográfico y biográfico del teatro antiguo español, desde sus orígenes hasta mediados del siglo XVIII*, Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1860), Louise Fothergill-Payne (*La alegoria en los autos y farsas anteriores a Calderón*, London: Tamesis Books, 1977), and Alexander A. Parker (*The Allegorical Drama of Calderón, an Introduction to the Autos Sacramentales*, Oxford: Dolphin Book, 1943). The works of Calderón are of great importance to any study of Sor Juana's works since they serve as exemplars: "the chief model of Juana's religious theater is the great Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681). Her villancicos are largely inspired by his" (Tavard 9).

36 This is according to Méndez Plancarte in the introduction to the third volume of works. He states, "*Esas Loas*, en su origen, casi se limitaban a su llana significación de 'alabanza': un saludo encomiástico a su 'generoso auditorio', y el breve esbozo y recomendación de la obra que presentaban, demandando silencio y benevolencia" (Méndez Plancarte Estudio lii) 'These *Loas*, in their origin, were almost limited to their everyday meaning of "praise": a commending greeting towards a "generous audience," and a brief recommendation of the work which was presented, demanding silence and benevolence." For more on the topic see *The Loa of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Lee A. Daniel, Fredericton, New Brunswick: York, 1994).
The fact that Sor Juana wrote for the King shows that Sor Juana had reason to believe that she would be recognized and heard in the royal court of Spain. This is not unlikely due to the popularity of her collection of poetry, as the *Inundación Castálida* was popular enough to warrant republishing eight times.\(^7\)

Her first work in this volume is the *Loa del Divino Narciso* and the *auto* itself *El Divino Narciso*.\(^8\) The *Loa* for this play is of a colonial theme, depicting the Spanish and the Méxicas and their interaction upon their first encounter.\(^9\) *El Divino Narciso* travels back to the Old World to give a new interpretation of an ancient Greek myth. In Sor Juana’s retelling, Christ is depicted as Narciso who falls in love with his own image (mankind) and then dies for its good. Eco then plays the role of “la Naturaleza Angélica Reproba” who is jealous and hateful of the object of Narciso’s love. This *auto*, believed by many critics to be the best of Sor Juana’s religious dramas, has been noted to share

\(^7\) The first publishing, under the title *Inundación Castálida*, in Madrid, was quickly followed by the second publishing, in 1690, this time with the collection being entitled simply *Poemas*. Under this title, the collection was republished in 1691, 1692, 1709 (twice - a first and second edition), 1714, and 1725 (once again, twice). The publication centers varied from Madrid to Barcelona, from Zaragoza to Valencia, and back to Madrid. This collection was not published in Mexico at that time.


\(^9\) This colonial theme is further studied in “La loa de ‘El divino Narciso’ de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y la doble recuperación de la cultura indígena mexicana” (Carmela Zanelli, *La literatura novohispana: Revisión crítica y propuestas metodológicas*, eds. José Pascual Buxo and Arnulfo Herrera; México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994; 183-200).
many formal aspects with Calderón de la Barca's *Eco y Narciso*.\(^{40}\) This is not surprising, however, as many of Sor Juana's works are patterned after famous works by other authors. This play was published in México in 1690, while her poems, in *Inundación Castálica*, were becoming famous in Spain.

The second *auto* presented in this volume is *El Mártir del Sacramento, San Hermenegildo*.\(^{41}\) The accompanying *loa* is patterned after a university debate over the nature of the proof of Christ's love for humanity: the argument lies in whether Christ's death is the biggest sign of his love, or whether it is the last supper.\(^{42}\) The argument is then related, by Sor Juana, to the figures of Hercules and Columbus. The *auto* itself is an "*auto* alegórico-historial," according to Méndez Plancarte (Estudio lxxviii), as it is based on the life of St. Hermenegild. The allegorical figures of Fe and the Virtudes have a part in this play, alongside the Saint who dies defending the nature of the sacrament. This play, considered terribly messy and ill written by the critics, has, consequently, upheld Sor Juana's claim that she wrote hurriedly to fulfill the commands given her. Méndez Plancarte states on the content of the play, "No disimularemos, sin embargo, que nuestro Auto padece un raro desliz doctrinal, ... ¿Cómo incurrió Sor Juana en tan claro 'lapsus' ... ?" (Estudio lxxx) 'We will not hide, however, that our

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\(^{40}\) Tavard states (9) that, for this play, Sor Juana borrows much of the theme from Calderón.


\(^{42}\) This question is also the point of contention in the famous *Carta Atenagórica*. 

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Auto suffers from a rare doctrinal slip, . . . How did it happen that Sor Juana had such a clear "lapse" . . . ?. Following this observation in the flaw of Sor Juana's dogma, comes an observation on the lack of care taken in her actual writing: "Abundan, en esta obra, los indicios de excesiva improvisación, . . . y aquí debimos, a un mayor galope, este asomarnos a sus borradores, y sorprender un doloroso límite de ‘aquel genio, aunque grande, al fin humano’" (Méndez Plancarte Estudio Ixxx) "In this work, the indices of excessive improvisation are abundant, . . . and here we owe to [writing at] a full gallop this peek into her rough drafts, and find a painful limit to “that genius, though big, in the end human.” Following the suggestions of Sor Juana, to assume that any errors or shortcomings found in her writing are due to the lack of time that she devotes to them, Méndez Plancarte deduces that Sor Juana was under great pressure to write the play, and finish it, before the Marquesa de la Laguna left for Spain. It is in this example, as in many others, that we see the effective nature of Sor Juana’s rhetoric. It is important to note, however, that although the modern critic notes a slip in Sor Juana’s doctrine, the clergy of the day did not. As noted earlier, there is no evidence pointing to any problems found with the Inquisition, which was quick to point out and investigate questions of faith.

In the next loa presented, the *Loa del Cetro de José*, there is a “sensitive” discussion concerning the human sacrifices and instances of ritual anthropophagism in

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43 The doctrinal slip noticed in Sor Juana’s occurs when the main character, St. Hermenegild, refuses the Eucharist from a bishop because the bishop is from a schismatic sect. Apparently, Méndez Plancarte argues that the bishop’s power to give the Eucharist is not damaged by this fact and that Sor Juana would have seen this had she taken the time to research that point (Estudio Ixxx).
the Aztec culture in comparison with the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Christ. This discussion is held between “la Fe,” “la Gracia,” “la Naturaleza,” and “la Ley Natural.” The themes tackled by these allegorical figures are those of monogamy in marriage and the difference between idolatry and Faith. The auto, El Cetro de José, is a retelling of the old testament story. In this auto, Sor Juana presents twenty-five scenes in which the well-known story of Joseph is transformed into a metaphor for personal salvation.44

Of the loose loas which then follow, a total of thirteen, only one is religious in nature. This Loa de la Concepción will be touched upon later as it is written on the knowledge and wisdom of Mary. The rest of the loas are written to honor dignitaries and their special occasions. There are five loas commemorating the birthday of King Carlos II. There are two loas written for the Queens, one to the Queen Maria Luisa de Orléans and one for the Queen Mother Mariana de Austria. There are four written for the viceroys of New Spain, either praising their beauty or wishing them a happy birthday. The final loa included is one directed to Fray Diego Velázquez de la Cadena on his birthday. This clergyman, though not very powerful, received a loa due to the fact that his brother was another of Sor Juana’s patrons and had paid for Sor Juana’s entrance into the convent.

The criticism of Sor Juana’s autos and loas suffers from lack of interest.45 There have been many examples of critics examining the works through someone else’s

44 To see this play within the context of other texts on the same topic see The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama (Michael McGaha, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1998).

45 For more information see Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y las vicisitudes de la crítica (José Pascual Buxó, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998).
retelling of it. Méndez Plancarte reviews this apathy when he states that the *autos* have commonly been mistaken in content and title in many critics' works and that the *loas* have suffered from conjecture and oblivion (Estudio vii-x). Of the *autos*, he states “Aun su mención, en volanderas notas o en formales trabajos, logra una inverosimil tradición de ‘lapsus,’ confusiones y escamoteos, que evidencian quizá el no conocerlos ni por el forro” (Méndez Plancarte Estudio viii) ‘Even their mention, in flying notes or in formal works, participate in a false tradition of “lapses,” confusions and mistakes, that testifies to a failure to know them even by their cover.’

**Prose and Drama**

The fourth volume of Sor Juana’s writing is composed of her secular drama, her *sainetes*, and her prose pieces. Her secular dramas, two in total, were written to be performed in a court setting. The *sainetes*, performed as interludes between the acts of a play, often were tied to the play in theme and complimentary to the play in tone. The two dramas, *Los Empeños de una Casa* and *Amor es Más Laberinto*, were performed in a ceremony and were preceded by a *loa*. *Los Empeños de una Casa* is especially

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surrounded by a cast of supporting pieces: other than the *loa* that introduces it, there are three songs designed to be performed in interludes ("Divina Fénix, permite," "Bellísimo Narciso," and "Tierno, adorado Adonis"), there are two *sainetes*, and a *sarao* of four nations (Spanish, Blacks, Italians, and Mexicans all speaking in alternating choruses). In and of themselves, the two dramas are conventional for their time: their characters have to overcome social obstacles through virtue and, in the end, everyone gets married.

Following the two dramas, *El Neptuno Alegórico* is then presented. This piece was written in prose as the accompanying explanation for the symbols carved and painted upon the triumphal arch that was constructed, which Sor Juana directed, in the commemoration of the entrance of the new Viceroy, the Marqueses de la Laguna, into the city. This prose piece is highly valued as a neo-classicist work, full of both Greek and Egyptian figures and symbols. Sor Juana was rewarded for the design and explanation of the arch, as was noted earlier. Not only was she paid for her participation in these very public events, she also won as patrons the new viceroys.

197-203), "Subversion through Comedy? Two Plays by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Maria de Zayas" (Constance Wilkins, *The Perception of Women in Spanish Theater of the Golden Age*, eds. Anita K. Stoll and Dawn L. Smith; Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1991; 102-120), and "El autorretrato en Sor Juana" (Sylvia G. Carullo, *Hispanic Journal* 11.2 [1990]: 91-105). It is interesting to note that Calderón de la Barca has a play called *Los Empeños de un Acaso* ("the commitments of an accident" as opposed to Sor Juana's 'the commitments of a home').

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The other prose pieces in this volume include a dedication for a publication of her works, the Carta Atenagórica, the famous Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz, and five pieces of religious prose. The Carta Atenagórica is a treatise that she wrote in response to a published sermon by the Jesuit Padre Antonio Vieira in 1650. According to Vieira, Christ’s greatest gift to mankind was his absence and not his death. This goes against the teachings of three Church Fathers. Sor Juana argues that the Church Fathers are correct, of course, and that Padre Vieira suffers from hubris in his disputation of accepted dogma. Through this argument, Sor Juana aligns herself with the Scholastic Tradition, showing herself to be theologically ensconced in the prescribed way of thinking. The Carta Atenagórica was intended, according to Sor Juana, to be a personal letter and commentary written for private use only. Published without her consent, her daring in correcting a respected priest, regardless of his daring, gained public admonition from the bishop of Puebla in the guise of a letter written from a nun, a Sor Filotea de la Cruz. Sor Juana responded to this reproach with her famous Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz, which has been termed her “intellectual autobiography.” These letters will be studied in greater detail in the chapter concerning Sor Juana’s participation in the Scholastic Tradition. the final works

49 The three Church fathers are St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. John Chrysostom. Sor Juana claims that she writes only to defend the argument of these Holy Fathers. It has been pointed out that St. Augustine and St. Jerome were friends, bringing into play Sor Juana’s loyalty to her convent. Vieira, in his criticism of the Church Fathers, “could only bring scandal in a community that was devoted to Augustine: the Hieronymites followed the Rule of St. Augustine; and it was commonly believed that Jerome, living as a hermit in Palestine, was a close friend of the bishop of Hippo, even though the two, who corresponded on occasion, never met” (Tavard 145).

50 Margaret Peden calls it this in her translation of the letter in A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.
included in the final volume of her collected works are what Sor Juana writes after her period of silence began. The devotional exercises include a treatise on Mary (*Ejercicios de la Encarnación*) which will be dealt with more thoroughly in the chapter on *Hagia Sophia*.

**A Profession for a Nun**

To assume that Sor Juana wrote not out of psychological need but out of commercial and social interest is to allow for the study of her works as literature. Under a psychoanalytic approach, her texts are nothing more than personal effusions. The psychoanalytic readings of her texts are difficult to uphold in light of the complex literary techniques the nun uses in order to entertain her audience as well as safeguard herself from possibly silencing criticism. The fact that Sor Juana has an audience and is aware of it makes it impossible to present her writings as meditations. That she does not utilize the same literary techniques in all of her writings, as is seen in the use of dialect only in texts designed to be publicly read in masses, shows that she wrote according to the tastes of the targeted audience.

Of all her works, it is the lyric poetry found in the first volume and the religious poetry, as written for masses, that displays clearly the fact that Sor Juana was indeed a writer by career. In this light, the whole of her works will be read and interpreted as having a mixture of functions: they will be considered less an expression of the author than as statements meant to earn approval and popularity. In a paradoxical manner, Sor Juana’s writing participates in the existing traditions and, simultaneously, challenges them through its participation. The importance of seeing Sor Juana as a writer, as
opposed to a woman who wrote (what she either felt or thought), lies in the ability to read her texts as by design: as planned, contrived, and, ostensibly, manipulative. Equally, the breadth of genre and themes that Sor Juana embarks upon makes it constructive to perceive this nun as a professional writer instead of a mystic or a religious writer of any sort. This liberty, to see her works as less than divinely inspired yet more than natural effusions, allows for an unrestricted study of her rhetoric and literary skill. A study of her participation within the existing literary traditions would allow for an understanding of Sor Juana as within a structured system.

The survey of Sor Juana’s works points to the professional nature of her writing. The diversity in themes, formats, styles, and tones show an awareness of the audience on behalf of the author. Her professional approach to her writing produced can also be seen in the way she manipulates her texts through the use of rhetoric. Sor Juana’s freedom to write was one which she could easily lose. Through the use of rhetoric, Sor Juana crafted an image of herself in her texts that would comply with all the requirements of propriety. Through her rhetoric of effusiveness, subservience, and indifference, Sor Juana creates an image of herself that is safe from criticism. What is culled out through a survey of Sor Juana’s works is the presence of authorial intentionality informing every text. Sor Juana shapes herself in her texts and utilizes the vision of herself she creates to manage her liberty.

Sor Juana’s use of her texts as her public voice creates an environment in her texts in which it can be assumed that Sor Juana will write only what she wants to have read. Her concern for reception, as seen through the formal aspects of her writing,
despite her statements to the contrary, make it clear that she composes for a public.

This awareness guarantees that in her texts it is not of herself but of her image that she will write. She will not present herself: she will present an image of herself and of women that will serve her in her quest for the liberty to write.
Chapter 3. Love Poetry: The Crafted Soul Through Lyric

This chapter will attempt to provide an alternative view of Sor Juana's love poetry. In order to furnish the appropriate background for Sor Juana's love poetry, it is necessary to become cognizant of the poet's consciousness of her own task of writing. The first part of this chapter will show how, through the poetry itself, the nun displayed her own process of writing and her mode of participation in the tradition of courtly love. In these texts, the poet, aware of her own task as author, looks to the literary tradition in order to find the literary tools that will make her own participation possible.

The second part of this chapter will attempt to reveal the problematic nature of reading Sor Juana's love poetry through psychoanalytic and biographic interpretations. The lack of actual biographic material in the case of Sor Juana makes it impossible for any conclusive reading of her texts utilizing conjectures on the nun's personal life or psychology. The love poetry, though for some too strong and intense to be without inspiration from personal experience, can only be seen conclusively as products of the poet's skill. The third part of this chapter will show the nature of the artist-patron relationship and the role that it played in the creation of the love poetry. The chapter will close with the study of the nature of love in Sor Juana's poetry. The love that Sor Juana talks about in her poetry is one that is seen through an academic perspective: there is a study of the effects of love, almost all of which are negative.

These poems participate in the courtly love poetic tradition of Dante and Petrarch. In her love poetry Sor Juana questions the boundaries of gender not only by writing of love for other women, but also by claiming, in some cases, an asexual nature.
Sor Juana’s love poetry, mostly written for other women, has, among some critics, brought into question Sor Juana’s sexual orientation. Some, however, have seen these poems as acts of liberation, removing the female from the male gaze and placing the female within the gaze of other women. Sor Juana clearly states that her love for other women is not deviant, as it is the love between two souls knowing that souls have no gender. As previously noted, in certain cases, Sor Juana claims that through her status as a nun, abstaining from the physical and social functions of a woman, she has gained the right to participate in things commonly denied to women. She states,

Con que a mí no es bien mirado
que como a mujer me miren,
pues no soy mujer que a alguno
de mujer pueda servirle (Cruz, poem 48, 1: 138, 101-104)

Since it is viewed favorably / that I be viewed as a woman / then I am not a woman who to anyone / may serve as a woman

In this view, her sexuality is denied by her vocation, making room for not only participation in the secular traditions of the literary world, but also for the love of other women.

**Writing for a Living: Artistic Awareness**

In the case of Sor Juana, the fact that she was a woman writing unabashedly was enough to question tradition. At no time did Sor Juana publish under a male pseudonym, making it clear to all of her readers that it was indeed a woman who wrote

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1 Early critics (Ludwig Pfandl, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: La décima musa de México*, 1963) have taken a Freudian approach to her writing, basing their literary interpretations on a conceived pathological nature of the female who would be author. Many subsequent critics, including Paz (*Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*, 1982), have not quite freed themselves from this style of analysis.
of love. The poet’s interests in profane topics such as love did draw criticism as being improper for a nun. This is most famously encountered in the *Carta de Sor Filotea de la Cruz*. However, within her own love poetry, Sor Juana admits an adherence to literary tradition. This can be seen in the references Sor Juana makes to writing: her own as well as those writings which she is attempting to imitate. In a poem written for her patron, the Countess of Galve, Sor Juana writes

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Sobre si es atrevimiento,
bella Elvira, responderte,
y sobre si también era
cobardía el no atreverme,
he pasado pensativa,
sobre un libro y un bufete
(porque vayan otros sobres),
sobre el amor que me debes,
    no sé yo qué tantos días (poem 43, 1: 123, 1-9)
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Over whether it is too daring, / beautiful Elvira, to respond to you, / and over if it is a cowardly / act not to dare to, / I have been thinking, / over a book and a desk / (so there can be other overs),\(^2\) / over the love that you owe me, / I don’t know how many days.

In the beginning stanzas of this poem, which is addressed to her patron in a very adoring way, Sor Juana clarifies that she writes “thinking” (*pensativa*) not only “over” the themes of love which she has decided to touch upon in the poem, but also physically over a book and a writing desk (*libro y un bufete*). The word play she highlights, utilizing *over* in two senses, figuratively and literally, points to the consciousness that

\(^2\) This phrasing could be read as a possible sexual innuendo. This possibility can lead the reader to many different conclusions. This quote could be utilized to support the hypothesis held by Paz, where Sor Juana finds herself with homosexual tendencies. On the other hand, a sexual reading of this line would be quickly dismissed by those determined to see Sor Juana as a proper nun (such as the cleric Menéndez y Pelayo). However, seeing the impersonal nature of the nun’s poetry, I believe it impossible to state with any certainty that the presence of sexual innuendo would prove more than the poet’s skill and awareness of her art.
the author has over her own task of writing. This consciousness of her own authorship is present throughout her work in the form of word play and statements of self-awareness.³

Sor Juana’s awareness is not limited to her own artistry, since the nun is, through education, aware of the conventions of the tradition of love poetry. In this same poem, Sor Juana clearly states that she has researched in the archives of knowledge in order to find a way to praise the beauty of her patron. The author claims that after an exhausting amount of research,

   después que estaba el caletre  
cansado asaz de pensar  
y de revolver papeles,  
   resuelta a escribirte ya, . . . (14-17)  
no hallé en luces ni colores  
comparación conveniente,  
que con más de quince palmos  
an tu hermosura viniese (Cruz, poem 43, 1:123,21-24)

   after the mind was tired / abundantly from thinking / and from shuffling papers, / resolved to write you already, . . . / I did not find in lights or colors / a convenient comparison, / that within fifteen spans / came close to your beauty.

Showing an acute awareness of her own obligations in the role as an artist in an artist-patron relationship, Sor Juana searches for a pattern to follow in order to write her

³ This point, however, is not always granted in the criticism of her work. In fact, the idea that Sor Juana’s writing is an act of effusive spontaneity, which directly comes into opposition with the idea of awareness and, necessarily, premeditation, can be seen in some of the criticism. In his prologue to the complete works that he presents, Alfonso Méndez Plancarte agrees with Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo and quotes him in stating of Sor Juana’s love poetry that “‘casi todo es espontáneo’ . . ., con la ‘expresión feliz y única,’ y que ‘son de los más suaves y delicados que han salido de pluma y mujer’ – aún si contamos ya a la Mistral, la Storni y la Ibarbourou–.” (Introducción xxxvi) “‘almost all is spontaneous’ . . ., with the ‘expression being happy and unique,’ and that ‘they are the most soft and delicate that have surged from the pen of a woman’ – even if we take into account Mistral, Storni, and Ibarbourou–.” It is clear to see in this phrasing that to these critics, the act of writing poetry for a woman was, and continues to be, an act of effervescent energy.
patron and praise her beauty. However, she claims that she writes this very complimentary poem after she has grown tired from researching and shuffling papers all day. This depiction of writing transforms the supposedly effusive creation of poetry into a tedious day job. The poet claims that her mind is exhausted from her failed search in the world of lights and colors: the attempts to find an object that the nun could use as a comparison to her patron’s beauty have met with dissatisfaction.

The nun, however, continues her search in the realm of poetry. Sor Juana announces her entrance into the literary realm by stating that,

Pues a los Poetas, ¡cuánto
les revolvi los afeites
con que hacen que una hermosura
dure aunque al tiempo le pese! (1: 124, 29-32)

Well, to the Poets: How / I shuffled the adornments / with which they make a beauty / last despite the weight of time!

Here, Sor Juana makes it clear that she turns to the poets in order to use their tools with which they commemorate beauty. Through studying, reading, the poets, she learns the trade in which a woman’s beauty can be salvaged from the ravages of time. Clearly, as the vassal in this relationship, she sees her role as the one who will immortalize her patron in the same way that other vassals have immortalized their mistresses. The inner turmoil which is attributed to the production of love poetry, in this particular poem, is portrayed by the agitation of research. In attempting to find the right model for her patron, Sor Juana’s torment is not the flame of love but the difficulty of study.

In her wording, “How I shuffled” (cuánto les revolvi), it is clear that Sor Juana does not simply copy what she sees in the poetic tradition; her interest is to take the
tools that the art supplies and arrange them in her own unique way. Creativity, therefore, is defined as originality not in the creation of novel components, but in the orchestration and manipulations of the elements already present in the tradition. This creation out of parts is, much like alchemy, hoping to create something greater by taking apart and re-constructing the already existing forms. This sentiment is further elucidated by Walter Benjamin:

The experimentation of the baroque writers resembles the practice of the [alchemical] adepts. The legacy of antiquity constitutes, item for item, the elements from which the new whole is mixed. Or rather: is constructed. For the perfect vision of this new phenomenon was the ruin. The exuberant subjection of antique elements in a structure which, without uniting them in a single whole, would, in destruction, still be superior to the harmonies of antiquity, is the purpose of the technique which applies itself separately, and ostentatiously, to realia, rhetorical figures and rules. Literature ought to be called *ars inveniendi* [the art of inventing or finding]. The notion of the man of genius, the master of the *ars inveniendi*, is that of a man who could manipulate models with sovereign skill. (178-179)

The art of inventing, as portrayed by Sor Juana in the poem quoted above, is constituted through borrowing the techniques of the greats. By studying the works of art of the past, Sor Juana hopes to create a work which, like alchemy, turns basic elements into gold.

Sor Juana then turns her attention to the commemoration of beautiful women in the tradition of love poetry. Her first example of the patterns that can be followed is Petrarch. She states,

> En Petrarca hallé una copia
> de una Laura, o de una duende,
> pues dicen que sér no tuvo
> más del que en sus versos tiene. (1: 124, 33-37)

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In Petrarch I found a copy / of a Laura or of a fairy / for it is said that she had no being / outside of what she has in his verses.

Clearly, Sor Juana consciously writes within the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry as she looks towards him and his depiction of Laura. What she chooses to state of Laura, of the doubt that she ever existed, creates an interesting insight into Sor Juana's understanding of the necessity of honesty in love poetry. She obviously believes that it was possible for Petrarch to write of loving a person who did not exist. Does this reflect on her own poetry? Does this mean that she does not see a problem in writing of a love that does not exist, of a timeless beauty that she may not see?

A long list of women who are praised through poetry follows. Sor Juana, in the next sixteen stanzas, delineates the tradition of the praise and immortalization of women through the use of verse. After enumerating many of the fine and worthy women who are depicted in literature, the nun states,

\[
y \text{ en fin, la Casa del Mundo}, \\
\text{que tantas pinturas tiene} \\
\text{de bellezas vividoras,} \\
\text{que están sin envejecerse,} \\
\text{cuya dura cama, el Tiempo,} \\
\text{que todas las cosas muerde} \\
\text{con los bocados de siglos,} \\
\text{no les puede entrar el diente, (1: 125, 101-108)}
\]

\[
\text{and, in the end, the House of the World, / which has portraits / of beautiful long-living women / that are not growing older, / and their hard bed, Time, / bites all things / with mouthfuls of centuries, / but cannot pierce them with its teeth}
\]

Sor Juana looks at the world's house to see that on its walls there are many women immortalized in their beauty. Impervious to time, these portraits are held by the poet to
be both the pattern that she wants to follow as well as the end goal that she desires for
her own portrait of her patron: Sor Juana wants to immortalize her patron’s beauty in
the way that Petrarch has immortalized the possibly imaginary Laura.

Sor Juana’s handling of the tradition of courtly love poetry is far from
customary in that it is a woman who writes these poems for other women; the poet,
despite her gender, is participating in a very open manner. Through the manner in
which she decides to participate in this particular literary tradition, she undermines the
basic tenets of the tradition itself. “Moreover,” one critic adds, “with her meticulous
knowledge of the great Text of love poetry that runs from the troubadours to her own
contemporaries, passing through the dolce stil nuovo, Sor Juana engages in a love
poetry that subtly questions, from within the conventions to which she ostensibly
adheres, the very terms of that tradition” (Gimbernat de González 162). The awareness
of authorship seen the texts and of the tradition into which her texts fell, is not unique
or surprising for an author; what is surprising is that signs of this self-awareness are to
be found within the texts themselves.

Sor Juana’s research into the literary tradition, according to the poet in her
poetry, does not provide her with a satisfactory model after which she can pattern the
portrait of her patron. She states that

revolvi, como ya digo,
sin que entre todas pudiese
hallar una que siquiera
en el vestido os semeje. (1: 126, 109-112)

I shuffled, as I have said, / without being able to find / in all [the
portraits] one that is / similar to you even in dress.
In praise for her patron, Sor Juana states that none of these great women, immortalized by the most renowned of poets, can be said to provide a mold in which Sor Juana can fit her patron’s beauty. Sor Juana then declares defeat by stating that she will no longer attempt to portray her patron and, instead, will be satisfied with only loving her (“ya sin tratar de pintarte, / sino sólo de quererte” [1: 126, 117-118] ‘now without trying to portray you, / but only loving you’). The research that the poet has done, both into the world of colors and lights as well as into the literary world, is given up when nothing comes close to depicting the beauty of her patron.

In an echo of the beginning of the poem, Sor Juana’s self-awareness of her role as an author re-surfaces as she resorts to, and then criticizes her use of, the figures of Icarus and Phaeton (124-125). First employing these mythical figures and then, in the next stanza, claiming that her use of these figures is childish and vulgar, the nun makes clear that she is aware, and even critical, of her own process of writing and of the standards to which she would like to adhere. In her critique of a previous stanza, she states

Mira qué vulgar ejemplo,  
que hasta los niños de leche  
faetonizan e icarizan  
la vez que se les ofrece. (1: 126, 125-128)

Look what a vulgar example / since even young children / phaetonize and icarusize / at every opportunity.

Despite Sor Juana’s claim in other poems that she hardly knows what she writes, she is aware of the literary figures, the literary tools that she employs, and their uniqueness.

Her critical stance towards her own product encases wonderfully within the theme of
the poem: the inability of both the poet’s skill and of the literary tradition to offer a 
portrayal of the artist’s patron that would do justice to the patron’s beauty and grace.

In conclusion, Sor Juana states that she does not know what to say (“no hallo 
quê decirte” [129]) to properly praise her patron. This, of course, is also a statement of 
poetic value as the poet has already asserted that her patron eclipses all of the great 
women found in the poetic tradition. Speaking of the favors that the nun receives from 
her patron (line 132), Sor Juana closes her tribute by stating that

Por ellos, Señora mía,
postrada beso mil veces
la tierra que pisas y
los pies, que no sé si tienes. (1: 126, 137-140)

For them, my lady, / prostrate I kiss a thousand times / the ground that 
you walk on and / your feet, which I don’t know if you have.

The nun ends her poem with a witty and speculative observation: despite the love that 
the artist claims to have for her patron, there is no security on the part of the artist of 
the physical constitution of her beloved.⁴

There is an aloofness present in all of Sor Juana’s love poetry. This detachment, 
although it can be interpreted in many ways, is created by the craftsmanship with which 
she designs the poetry. Though there are those who would rather believe that the nun 
loved, and loved deeply, in order to know of what she wrote, within the constructions of 
the poems themselves it is possible to see the academic curiosity that Sor Juana has

⁴ This, interestingly enough, is not the only place where Sor Juana declares her ignorance to her 
patron’s anatomical completeness. In another poem, poem 80 (1: 208), the nun once again doubts the 
existence of her patron’s feet, and gives a reason for that, by stating, “los pies, si es que los tiene, / nunca 
los vide; / y es que nunca a un Valiente / los pies le sirven” (41-44) “the feet, if she has some, / I have never 
seen; / and it is because never to a Valiant / do the feet serve.” Through the contextualization provided by 
this poem, the absence of feet would then be seen as a flattering remark on the part of the nun.
toward the subject of love. The poet writes of love, as a scholar of human emotion dissecting it and studying it with uncanny precision. According to the poem previously studied, her primary research is done in the library, at her desk, shuffling through the world of objects and poetry. The prior depictions of love and beauty that the poet finds in the writing of others allow her to create her own.

Her participation in this discourse is unsettling to some, due to her gender. As it has been stated, “Sor Juana también tuvo que sortear un problema, derivado de su condición de mujer, al escribir poesía amorosa. Era evidente que la tradición poética amorosa no había previsto que las mujeres pudiesen ocupar un lugar reservado a los hombres. Sor Juana se encontró, así, con el inicial problema de fijar el sujeto del enunciado del poema” (González Boixo 79) ‘Sor Juana also had to resolve a problem, derived from her condition as a woman, when writing love poetry. It was evident that the tradition of love poetry had not foreseen that women may occupy the space reserved for men. Sor Juana found herself, in that way, with the initial problem of situating the speaking subject of the poem.’ It can be seen that Sor Juana, whether speaking through the voice of a male or of a female, could not write love poetry without transgressing in one way or another due to her condición de mujer. If she were to participate in the literary tradition of courtly love poetry, the three alternatives imaginable at the time were for her to utilize either the voice of a man in love with a woman, the voice of woman in love with a man, or the voice of a woman in love with another woman. Never one to eschew her literary options, she did all three.
The fact that Sor Juana writes some poems utilizing a male voice functions in further complicating the fact that she is a woman participating in a male tradition.

About these poems where the nun employs a male narrator, it has been stated:

The construction of the poems, addressed to the females Anarda, Lisarda, and Celia, clearly distinguishes the voice of the poet (hers), from that of the lover (a male voice), which thus creates a critical space within the text itself. What does the male lover say to his female beloved when the poet is a woman? This whole lyric tradition partakes of a field of metaphors, paradoxes, and hyperboles ruled by conventions whose hierarchical system imposes set relationships of values and power. (Gimbernat de González 163)

Sor Juana gains another tool with which to analyze love through the use of the male perspective. The poet does not limit herself to either the masculine or the feminine voice in the same way that she does not limit herself to certain topics just because she is a nun.

The precarious position of Sor Juana, as a female writer in a male literary world, simply cannot be avoided due to the nature of the literary traditions. The nature of love poetry demands that it be written of love and in the first person. These two peculiarities are enough to complicate the participation of any female, especially a nun from a non-aristocratic family who does not write under a male pseudonym. That the voice in many of the poems is feminine, though in technique and in content no other aspects may be

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5 In a love poem written to Celia (Cruz, poem 141, 1: 272), the “yo” is clearly stated as male in line 36 where the narrator states that he is “atado / en mi amorosa locura” (36-37) ‘tied / in my loving insanity’ (where atado is in the masculine form). It is a poem written well within the tradition of courtly love poetry as it is detailing the lover’s complaints of his rejection by the quite perfect and beautiful beloved. I find it interesting to point out that the making of the voice masculine through the use of one word was determined by technical considerations, since atado would not have worked in the rhyme scheme.
differing from the conventional, is enough to challenge the literary tradition. Of her use of first person, a critic states:

Sor Juana escribió sus poemas amorosos en primera persona. No podía ser de otra manera, ya que desde la tradición del amor cortés, y desde Petrarca, el yo poético se correspondía con el arquetipo del amante. Al identificar el yo poético con el autor, Sor Juana seguía fielmente la tradición, pero, al mismo tiempo, introducía un elemento distorsionador, ya que se trataba de un «yo poético» femenino (lo que hace prácticamente siempre, ya que los poemas en que habla un varón se limitan a cuatro sonetos). Ese «yo poético» femenino era difícil de encajar en una tradición que siempre había sido la del «yo» masculino. (González Boixo 79)

Sor Juana wrote her love poems in first person. It could not be any other way, since from the tradition of courtly love and Petrarch, the poetic I corresponds with the archetypal lover. In identifying the poetic I with the author, Sor Juana faithfully follows the tradition, but, at the same time, introduces a distorting element since it deals with a feminine “poetic I” (which she utilizes practically all the time since the poems in which a male speaks are limited to four sonnets). That feminine “poetic I” is difficult to place in a tradition that has always been that of the masculine “I.”

A necessary part of the complication that Sor Juana inspires in the literary world is the fact that her condición de mujer is known by her reader. The reader, who according to the decorum of the love poetry tradition associates the speaker of the poem with the author and, in this particular instance, finds himself facing the unlikely situation where the author happens to be a woman is expected to react differently in some way. But noting that Sor Juana’s collections of poetry were popular enough to be reprinted repeatedly in a short period of time after their initial release, it can be readily inferred that the gender of the author did not negatively affect the interest of the general reader.
The fact that the author is a woman, writing love poetry as a woman and to other women, affects the way that the literary critics see her. There is a tendency to see Sor Juana’s act of participating in this tradition as an act of defiance and of empowerment for women. It is necessary, however, to keep in mind that the contents of the poems were not different from what the tradition prescribed. Though it can be considered a trailblazing act on her behalf to write, the poetry itself was traditional with the exception of the appearance of feminine adjectives when referring to the speaker of the poem.

The Weight of Favors: Patronage

The number of poems that Sor Juana dedicates to the subject of love is puzzling to some critics due to the nun’s declared disgust toward love. Merrim questions: “Why did Sor Juana write so much love poetry? Not only was it untoward for a nun, but love is a topic and emotion that seems to inspire true repugnance in Sor Juana. Consider the titles of the following poems, that revile love…” (Early 53). Merrim herself comes to the conclusion that, if nothing else, Sor Juana participated in the literary tradition by

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6 The argument that Sor Juana is acting on behalf of all womankind is questionable since it is intrinsically tied to the essentialist argument that Sor Juana writes as a woman or, better stated, in a feminine way. For example, one critic states, “Sor Juana no puede renunciar, por principios personales, a representar la voz femenina, pero no acepta limitarse a desempeñar el pequeño papel que la tradición había asignado a la mujer en las relaciones amorosas. La mujer deja de ser en la poesía de Sor Juana el elemento pasivo de la relación amorosa; recupera algo que el hombre le había usurpado: la capacidad de expresar la variada gama de situaciones amorosas que la tradición ofrecía, desde un punto de vista femenino” (González Boixo 79). “Sor Juana cannot renounce, due to her personal principles, representing the feminine voice though she does not accept limiting herself to act out the small role that the tradition had assigned to women in the relationships of love. In Sor Juana’s poetry, the woman stops being a passive element in the relationship. She [woman] recuperates something that men had taken away: the power to express the varying range of situations of love [relationships] that the tradition offers from a feminine point of view.” Though this is a tempting argument on behalf of the strength of Sor Juana’s writing, it produces questions over the nature of writing and of gender that do not aid in this (or any) study.
writing of love in a time and place where poetry and love defined themselves through the other. In the end of the *Siglo de Oro*, how could a poet not write of love? It is stated, “For to be a lyric poet was to be a love poet; love was poetry and poetry love” (Merrim *Early* 53). It is not surprising, therefore, that Sor Juana wrote of love with such zeal. A closer study of her approach toward love in her poetry is of interest.

There is tension present in the interpretations of Sor Juana’s love poetry. The tension centers itself on the two conflicting motivations assumed to be behind the nun’s creation of love poetry. It is possible that the nun participated in the tradition of love poetry because of her intellectual interest, as a literary exercise in one more genre. Most critics, however, want to believe that Sor Juana had a more intimate reason for writing love poetry. There is an impulse in the existing criticism to presume that the emotions that the nun revealed in her poetry are genuine, though most critics do not believe that Sor Juana was actually in love with the women to whom she addressed the poems.

Critics have asserted that Sor Juana found in the genre of love poetry an outlet for other emotions, both intellectual and sentimental. Of this strain of criticism, which attempts to determine the nature of the inclination that drove the nun toward writing love poetry,

7 The push to see the emotion as real, though not directed towards the addressee of the poem, has gained a considerable following. Wanting to believe Sor Juana’s autobiographical statement that she felt naturally drawn towards classical learning and the intellectual life, most believe that the emotion found in her love poetry reflects her personal struggle to choose between a passive life of religious and moral subservience and an active life of the intellect. As Merrim questions: “did Sor Juana cipher into some of the love poetry an allegorical meaning, using the conventionalized forms of love poetry covertly to express the struggle between her love for church and for knowledge? Or was Sor Juana burdened less with abstract than with emotional struggles, with a melancholy for which the consecrated and depersonalized topics of courtly love provided an acceptable outlet?” (*Early* 53). Merrim states that the love Sor Juana presents in her poetry is one that can be described as a “amor de entendimiento” or “cerebral love” (*Early* 67). In this case, then, the love displayed is “essentially Neoplatonic—a pure love, of the soul and mind and not of the body—that is, the rational or elective love” (Merrim *Early* 67). Regardless of the real emotion behind the poetry, should there indeed have been any worthy of mention, it is undeterminable from the poetry alone.
one critic states, “El hecho de que una religiosa del siglo XVII dedique poemas de amor ferviente a una mujer, sea Leonor Carreto, marquesa de Mancera, o sea María Luisa Manrique de Lara, condesa de Paredes, marquesa de la Laguna y también virreina –respectivamente Laura y Lysi en sus versos– ha sorprendido a no pocos y ha hecho verter ríos de tinta” (Millares 89) ‘the fact that a nun of the XVII century would dedicate fervent love poetry to a woman, whether it be Leonor Carreto, marquesa de Mancera, or María Luisa Manrique de Lara, condesa de Paredes, marquesa de la Laguna and also vicereine –respectively Laura and Lysi in her verses– has surprised no small number and has cause the spilling of rivers of ink.’ Though there are many possible explanations for the poetic acts of this nun, both in the licit and illicit categories, there is no evidence outside of the poetry itself that can serve as a guide in the hunt for a clear explanation.

It is necessary, however, to point out that Sor Juana’s love poetry served a more pragmatic purpose. With her patrons, Sor Juana utilized the love poem as a tool to gain grace and favors. Her position as a subordinate is highlighted and even magnified in her poetry. Declaring herself to be hopelessly in love with her patrons, Sor Juana utilizes the tradition of courtly love poetry to appease them. Speaking of the poem “Hete yo, divina Lysi,” (Cruz, poem 18, 1: 52) one critic states that it is “un magnífico ejemplo, que puede servir para remachar lo dicho” (Glantz 33) ‘it appears to me a magnificent example that can serve to drive the point home of what has been stated.’ This poem displays “lasintrincadas relaciones de dependencia establecidas por la cortesanía, las mismas que se comprueban en la exacerbación del elogio, elevando su objeto hasta lo
más alto, aquello que colinda con la divinidad’ (Glantz 33) ‘the intricate relationships of dependence established by the court, the same that are confirmed in the exacerbation of praise, elevating the object unto the most high, that which borders divinity.’ The love that Sor Juana claims to have in this poem written for her patron leaves the realm of praise to enter into a world where the patron is no longer a woman: she is the personification of beauty and grace. This devout love found in her poetry is a form of appeasement as it displays the artist’s devotion to the patron’s whim.

The poem “Hete yo, divina Lysi” (Cruz, poem 18, 1: 52), which was written in apology to her patrons after Sor Juana could not entertain them when they came to visit her in the convent while she was in the midst of a religious retreat, shows the disparity of power between the poet and her patrons. Speaking of the audacity of the patrons to reprimand the nun for not seeing them, one critic states: “y a pesar de estar conscientes de que una monja debe respetar las obligaciones prescritas en sus votos, la visitan a hora intempestivas y, para el convento, sagradas y, al no encontrarla, formulan una queja” (Glantz 35) ‘and despite being conscious that a nun has to respect the established obligations of her vows, they visit her at an unreasonable hour and, for the convent, a sacred hour, and, at not finding her, they formulate a reproach.’ Clearly, the position of the artist is to please the patron, despite any other obligations. The audacity of her patrons to insist upon such an improper thing, however, is not the only surprising aspect of this encounter. The reply that the nun sends her patrons is most astonishing, seeing the nature of their demand. Sor Juana writes a poem that is not only apologetic for her inability to see them, she also raises Lysi to an astounding, semi-heretical level
of divinity. In the poem, full of religious terminology, Sor Juana declares to the
marquesa “Ángel eres en belleza, / y Ángel en sabiduría” (13-14) ‘Angel you are in
beauty, / and Angel you are in knowledge,’ clearly adopting the religious phrasing to
describe the marquesa’s being. Never leaving the religious context behind in the course
of the poem, the nun continues to elevate the position of her patron. At one point, while
giving her reasons as to why she has not been in contact during the time that she was in
retreat, Sor Juana states that not seeing her patron served for her a religious purpose.

She states,

Y también, porque en el tiempo
que la Iglesia nos destina
a que en mortificaciones
compensemos las delicias,
por pasar algunas yo,
que tantas hacer debía,
hice la mayor, y quise
ayunar de tus noticias. (33-40)

And also because in the time / that the Church destines us / to
compensate for pleasure / through mortifications, / in order to have some
[mortification] I, / who owed so many, / made the greatest [sacrifice],
and desired / to fast from knowing of you.

* The mixture of religious and erotic language in love poetry is not unique to this nun. The
tradition of courtly love lent itself to the conflation of various media. “The reason why this poetry makes
no rational sense for human love,” it is explained, “is because it uses the concepts and language of
something different: of religion” (Parker 21). The religion of love in poetry is carried to the farthest
extreme possible: “for the lover is presented as a martyr for his faith, and what is more, his martyrdom is
identified with the passion of Christ” (Parker 23). The poet, in the role of the lover, must suffer love as
Christ suffers for humanity. The heretical tone of this rhetoric, present in Sor Juana’s poetry, was present
in the genre. This benign heresy, however, did more than shock: “such an equation of love and religion is,
if taken literally, the height not just of extravagance but of blasphemy, but it demands to be taken seriously
as an attempt to raise human eroticism onto a plane of positive value away from its century-long
association with the capital sin of lust” (Parker 23). Through the association of earthly love and religion
love is elevated.
Sor Juana clearly states that in order to fulfill her religious duties, she sacrifices the thing that matters to her the most: news of her lovely patron. The mixture of religious terminology and a profane subject is utilized by the author to appease the wrong perceived by her patrons.

Therefore, Sor Juana’s patrons, who do not seem to respect the religious obligations of the nun, in the apologetic poem are turned into divinities themselves. As Margo Glantz states:

La respuesta de la religiosa es también sorprendente: la única posibilidad de mitigar el agravio—un agravio originado simplemente en un capricho del poderoso que cree tener razón en todo—, es responder usando como materia de elogio y sustento de la justificación aquello mismo que ha obrado como impedimento para colmar de inmediato el deseo de los marqueses, el servicio religioso obligatorio, causa de la descortesía. Obligada por su estado a respetar sus ocupaciones reglamentarias, Sor Juana las convierte en sujeto poético y, en lugar de referirse a Dios o a las altas esferas celestiales donde viven los subordinados divinos, los sustituye por la figura de los marqueses, convertidos así en objeto de las adoraciones de Sor Juana. (35)

The response of the nun is also surprising: the only possibility of mitigating the wrong—a wrong originated simply because of the whim of the powerful who believes that they are right about everything—is to respond using as the subject of praise and support of the justification the very thing that had worked as an impediment to the immediate desire of the marqueses: the obligatory religious services—cause of the discourtesy. Obliged by her state to respect her mandated duties, Sor Juana converts them into the poetic subject and, in place of alluding to God or the higher celestial spheres where the divine subordinates lived, she substitutes them for the figure of the marqueses, in this way converted into the object of adoration of Sor Juana.

In this poem, through the exaggerated veneration of her patrons, Sor Juana clearly shows that she needs to appease them in order to maintain their favors. This is, obviously, far from a relationship of equals. If this poem can be used as evidence of her
subservience, Sor Juana cannot do without the support that she receives from her patrons. Therefore, regardless of who is to blame in any situation, or how unreasonable the demands of her patrons are, the nun responds with praise and reverence.

Though it is obvious that the poet's situation is not one in which she can write freely, there are more than a single set of regulations that the nun must follow. There are the limits as set by the Catholic Church, the limits as set by the existing literary traditions, and, surprisingly, the limits as set by her patrons. This realization, that Sor Juana is in a situation where the reliance upon the whim of her patrons makes it necessary that they be pleased with her writings at all times, could explain the immoderate abundance of poetry of love and praise. The fact that these poems, though conventional in many ways and written to satisfy varying sets of standards, are considered to be innovative is a sign of Sor Juana’s skill as an author. As Glantz further notes on the situation, “la libertad lograda por Sor Juana gracias a los favores de la corte se ve limitada también por esos mismos favores; nos encontramos ante un caso de constrictión extrema y a la vez de una gran manifestación de libertad por parte de la monja. Sor Juana respeta las convenciones pero también las hace saltar” (footnote 4, 35) ‘the freedom acquired by Sor Juana due to the favors of the court are also seen to be limited by those very same favors; we find ourselves before a case of extreme constriction and, at the same time, of a great manifestation of liberty on the nun’s behalf. Sor Juana respects the conventions but also makes them dance.’ The poet, caught in a corner, thrust between obligations toward the Church and obligations
toward her patrons, blends them together in her poetry to appease the offended party while always obeying the conventions of the genre.\(^9\)

The nun’s secular obligations are fulfilled through her poetry, love or otherwise. Sor Juana obviously functioned in a barter system with her patrons: whatever favors she received from her patrons warranted her reply through the offering of poetry and presents. Her verses, therefore, were her form of participation in the traditional economy between artist and patron. As a critic notes:

Sus versos son muy significativos: la monja responde a las mercedes con romances, sonetos, décimas, liras, a los que añade delicados presentes—que podrían ser vistos como finezas—y por los que a su vez, de nuevo, recibe elogios, prebendas, dinero. El tipo de obsequios escogido para reforzar el elogio—y realizar lo que ya se ha dicho con palabras—puede deducirse si leemos algunos de los títulos de los poemas escritos por Sor Juana en honor de sus protectores, donde se mencionan los objetos que han servido como regalo, insisto: diademas, nueces, zapatos, andadores, nacimientos de marfil, peces bobos y aves, zapatos bordados, recados de chocolate, perlas. (Glantz 41)

Her verses are very meaningful. The nun responds to favors with romances, sonnets, décimas, liras, to which she adds delicate presents—that could be seen as courtesy—and for which in turn, again, she receives praise, benefits, money. The type of gifts chosen to reinforce the praise—and realize what has already been said with words—can be deduced if we read some of the titles for the poems written by Sor Juana in honor of her protectors. There the objects that have served as gifts are

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\(^9\) This mixture of the secular and the divine does not sit well with all of Sor Juana’s critics. Some do see in this type of poem, where the nun elevates her patrons to a divine sphere, tinges of heresy. After studying the poem in question, one critic states “puede parecer sacrilego: el ayuno obligatorio de la Semana Mayor, mortificación necesaria para un cristiano y mucho más para una monja, se maneja como un sacrificio, que en lugar de ofrecerse a Cristo, como debiera ser, se transmuta en un signo de devoción a la marquesa y, por tanto, de delicia, un refinamiento extremo, una mortificación exquisita, causa «ayunar de tus noticias»” (Glantz 35) “it can appear to be sacrilegious: the obligatory fasting of the Major Week, the mortification necessary for a Christian, especially a nun, is handled as a sacrifice that instead of being offered to Christ, as it ought to be, is converted into a sign of devotion to the Marquesa and, in so doing, [it is converted into] a delight, an extreme refinement, an exquisite mortification, that is caused by the “fasting from news of you”.” Since the Inquisition never seemed to have a difficulty with Sor Juana’s poetry, there was obviously an understanding at the time that it was a poem of courtly love and not heresy.
mentioned. I insist: tiaras, nuts, shoes, walkers, marble nativity sets, peces bobos and birds, embroidered shoes, chocolate recados, pearls.

Not only does the nun write the poems as praise, she writes the poems as accompanying letters to the presents that she gives her patrons. The poetry, therefore, is both the object of exchange as well as the explication of the motivations behind the exchange. They serve not only as praise, but also as presents. By doing so, Sor Juana secures for herself the many benefits that her patrons had the power to give.

Despite this economy, criticism persists with its interest in detecting a personal significance in the ardor found in the love poetry. Perceived in Sor Juana’s poetry, by most critics, is an actual affection that hides behind the features of a literary tradition. Even in the face of the artist-patron relationship and Sor Juana’s obvious need for protection, most critics tend to see an emotive quality in the poetry that, to them, cannot be explained alone by an economic or power schema. The view that Sor Juana writes to please her patron is clearly seen in the field of criticism, as it is in the summary provided by Merrim where she states: “Sor Juana’s love poems to women would thus be poems of vassalage raised to an amatory power. To support his contention, Paz traces the seamless, constant exchange between erotic language and the language of vassalage in courtly poetry, which C. S. Lewis calls the ‘feudalisation of love’” (Early 68). Here, the critic notes that it has been in the tradition of the literary criticism of Sor Juana to note the poet’s socio-economic position as a vassal in need of her patron’s favors.
As many critics including Paz have noted, the poetry of the nun treats love in the context of vassalage, and in that way, does not leave the confines of literary tradition.\textsuperscript{10} This observation, however, does not prevent the critics from attempting to find through the words of the poet a hidden yet real affection for her patrons. After stating conclusively that the nun wrote in order to fulfill the duties of her status, the possibility of an ulterior psychological motivation for writing love poetry remains in the foreground. This can be seen in the statement by Merrim where she states:

One naturally wonders what at heart motivated Sor Juana to write such impassioned (and conventional) courtly love poems to a woman. I broach the subject with neither prurience nor militancy, but to round out our sense of Sor Juana’s celebration of women in the love poetry. Octavio Paz acknowledges that the nun’s love poems to women are more heartfelt and less disembodied than her poems to men and raises the possibility of a homoerotic attraction between Sor Juana and the Countess de Paredes (e.g., 217). (Early 68)

The fact that Sor Juana is participating in literary convention does not, in the eyes of the critics, place in doubt the veracity of the emotion found in her poetry. At this time, it should be noted that it is true that Sor Juana writes more poetry dedicated to women than she does to men, and, importantly, in the love poetry Sor Juana never writes to or of actual men.

Though a great percentage of love poetry and poetry of praise is directed toward her female patrons, no love poem addressing a male was dedicated to an existing person. There are many poems of praise, and some of ridicule, however, that are

\textsuperscript{10} This view is further supported by the warning that “those who read Sor Juana’s love lyric written to members of her own sex as a confessional outpouring of emotion would do well to remember the degree to which love was official discourse, institutionalized parlance, and the prime vehicle of social mobility” (Luciani 188).
directed toward men in her society. It is clear that the propriety of a nun writing love poetry to a male is the point in question here. The poet may have felt safe in writing passionate poems of love to beloved female patrons, and indeed, it is even possible that while living in a convent she may have been limited to only female friendships. The passion with which she writes, however, without any corroborating evidence outside of her poetry, cannot be interpreted to signify anything beyond her poetic skill.\(^\text{11}\) The observation that Sor Juana’s male characters have no depth can be explained by stating that they were simply not that many poems about male characters, and those male characters who did appear were, necessarily, not patterned after an existing person.\(^\text{12}\) That Sor Juana’s female characters are more substantive is only logical since most of

\(^{11}\) The tendency to attempt to read beyond the art itself and into the motivations of the artist provides prime examples of a circumstance in which the opinion of the text is decided by the psychoanalysis of the artist. As reported by Spear, in the case of Guido Reni, a famous painter, his biographers have been noted to heighten his innocence to explain the level of skill seen in his paintings. This is to be compared with the view of Sor Juana where her innocence is questioned, despite vows, because of the skill seen in her poetry. In Reni’s case, he is said to have seen the Virgin because of his skill in depicting her. Speaking of the assumptions made by Malvasia, Reni’s first biographer, Spear states: “Reni’s reported virginity alone might mean little, yet it struck Malvasia as noteworthy, particularly since Reni had taken no religious vow of chastity. Malvasia doubted the assumption made by ‘many’ that, ‘because of [Reni’s] great devotion, the Virgin deigned to appear before him, he being no less a virgin.’ The biographer continued that, ‘no painter of any century ever knew how to represent her with a greater combination of beauty and modesty’” (51). In Sor Juana’s case, she is said to have felt love because of her skill in depicting it. In both cases, there is a denial of the importance of skill to the artist in a world where experience is what matters.

\(^{12}\) This observation, famously made by Paz, who states of Sor Juana’s personality, “no debe olvidarse, además de su extremo intelectualismo –adverso a la vida matrimonial–, su actitud ante hombres y mujeres. Los primeros, en sus poemas, son fantasmas, sombras sin cuerpo; las segundas, presencias reales” (145) ‘one should not forget, besides her extreme intellectualism–antithetic to the married life–, her attitude towards men and women. The former, in her poems, are ghosts, shadows without bodies; the latter, [are] real presences.” Paz makes this a point in favor of his interpretations which indicates the presence of a homoerotic element in the nun’s poetry. Other critics, basing their work on Paz’s landmark interpretation, find the same set of suspicious circumstances crowding their own readings of Sor Juana’s love poetry. Merrim states, “indeed, in the poems celebrating the superior rational love of one woman for another and its conceivably more real affective ties for Sor Juana (I think of Paz’s statement that one ‘can see Sor Juana’s women; her men are ‘ghostly shadows’’ [226]), the courtly model that exalts the beloved asserts itself in full force” (Early 67). Thus, the suspicion over Sor Juana’s sexuality continues.
the poetry, written for and addressed to her patrons, had to please and flatter the women
for whom they were written. I should also state that the substantive aspect of these
women is created in large part due to the sheer number of poems dedicated to the
individual women. Regardless of the numbers, however, it is impossible to state that the
women are depicted in anything but stylized forms.

The fact that the tradition of love poetry was so ingrained in the political and
social fabric of the time makes it necessary to see the poetry of Sor Juana as her way of
participating in society through due format. There is, as Merrim states, “no doubt the
unswerving—in both the literal and the Bloomian senses—adherence to the courtly
model, found more in the love poetry to women than elsewhere in Sor Juana’s lyric,
supports . . . and favors a political explanation of the poems” (Early 69). Nevertheless,
after having stated that the societal context surrounding Sor Juana explains, in great
part, the motivation that the nun may have had in writing love poetry, there remains a
suspicion of something more illicit. That Sor Juana decides to show her vassalage
through love poetry and not through the other means at her disposal is what makes her
case questionable in the eyes of some critics. As Merrim states: “given the fact that Sor
Juana had at her disposal, and indeed, extensively utilized vehicles other than outright
and fervent love poems to express her ties to the body politic (i.e., praise poems and
occasional poetry), I believe that a balanced view is called for, one that does not
discount any of the factors in this unresolvable conundrum” (Early 69). The poet, as has
been previously demonstrated, indeed had many other options in displaying her
adoration for her patrons. Well versed in a wide spectrum of the literary traditions at her disposal, Sor Juana was free to choose which route to follow in her praise.

The challenge for the reader, in the context of today’s criticism, is to see Sor Juana’s poetry independently of the problematic nature of her status as a female writer. Without any knowledge of her personal life or psychology or any conjectures on the impulses that led her to write, all of the poetry of Sor Juana Inés is very much a worthy subject of study. As one critic states,

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con independencia del verdadero sentir de nuestra autora, lo cierto es que se limita a adoptar los códigos del amor cortés, de extensa y fructífera andadura desde las propuestas de Catulo o Propercio, a través de los modos provenzales, stilnovisti y petrarquescos, hasta su prolífica y retorizada proyección en las postrimerías del medievo y en los siglos de oro. Si el lenguaje del erotismo, desde el bíblico Cantar de los Cantares, aporta códigos posibles a la escritura de San Juan de la Cruz, y si el mundo de los mitos grecolatinos o los motivos caballerescos devienen corpus de símbolos y signos que cifran un pensamiento que se lee como ortodoxo –y puede aquí recordarse que en sus poemas sacros Sor Juana presenta a la Virgen María con códigos caballerescos o míticos que le vinculan a los valores de las diosas grecolatinas–, entonces no ha de sorprender el apasionado erotismo de su poesía cortesana, que, por demás, tal vez debería ser mayor objeto de atención que la mera anécdota curiosa subyacente, ya que no deja de ser novedosa su configuración. (Millares 89)
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Independently from the true feelings of our author, the certainty is that she limits herself to adopting the codes of courtly love, which has an extensive and fruitful progress from the postulates of Catullus or Propercio, through the provincial style, stilnovisti and petrarchan, to the prolific and rhetoricized projection in the twilight of the medieval time and the siglos de oro. If the language of eroticism, beginning in the biblical Song of Songs, conveys possible keys to the writings of St. John of the Cross, and if the world of the Greek and Roman myths and of the chivalric motifs evolve into a corpus of symbols and signs that cipher an ideology that is read as orthodox—and it can be remembered at this point that in her sacred poetry Sor Juana presents the Virgin Mary with chivalric or mythical terms that tie her to the values of the Greco-Latin
goddesses—, then the passionate eroticism of her courtly poetry should not be surprising. What is more, maybe it [the stylistically erotic aspects] should be the object which receives the most attention, since it does not stop being original in its composition, more than the mere, curious and underlying anecdote [of her psychology].

The value of Sor Juana’s poetry does not lie in the conjectures over her personal life; in and of itself, the nun’s poetry has much merit as an object of study for the modern critic. The way in which this woman treats the subject of love in her love poetry is a spectacle worth examining independently from any of the psychoanalytic explanations that can be offered. The fact that Sor Juana chose the genre of love poetry as a way to display her subservience to her patrons, whether or not it is a sign of any other feelings, explains, in part, the large number of love poems Sor Juana produced.

Love as a Curiosity

In the many love poems written by Sor Juana, there is an overriding sense of curiosity: it seems that the poet is investigating the details and the recesses of the nature of love. Some of the poems, though in one way heartfelt, seem to deconstruct love, taking apart its pieces to study how it comes together again. In Sor Juana’s version of love, the question of the rational and irrational is never too far away. Of this, Paz, despite proposing the element of homoeroticism as a central concern in the criticism of Sor Juana’s works, states that: “el conocimiento erótico que revelan los poemas y las comedias de Sor Juana es, tanto o más que el resultado de una experiencia, un saber codificado por la tradición: una retórica, una casuística y hasta una lógica. Justamente por esto puede hacerse un tratado del amor con los poemas de Sor Juana: son conceptos y arquetipos, no confesiones” (147) ‘the erotic knowledge that is revealed in the poems

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and the comedies of Sor Juana is, more than the product of an experience, a traditionally codified knowledge: a rhetoric, a casuistry, and even a logic. Because of this, a treatise of love can be made utilizing the poems of Sor Juana: they are concepts and archetypes, not confessions.’ The poetry itself, then, can be seen as studies over the nature and the elements that make up love and not as admissions of love from the poet.

In Sor Juana’s poetry, there is an intellectual interest in what can be called the unreasonable side of human nature. Sor Juana formidably and famously tackles the issue of the intellectual limitations of human reason in her work El Sueño. It has been stated that it is possible that the nun may have taken as much interest in the nature of human emotion and its limitations as she does in the nature of knowledge and human intellect. If this is indeed the case, Sor Juana’s love poetry can be seen as a foray into the realm of the unknown that is the realm of human emotion. In her questioning of the sheer number of love poems that Sor Juana writes, Stephanie Merrim states that, “while in the Sueño Sor Juana exhaustively investigates the pure world of reason and knowledge, in her love poetry she extensively interrogates the passionate world of unreason and not-knowing” (Early 54). With this perspective, the study of Sor Juana’s love poetry abandons the idea that the nun felt the emotions that are expressed in the poetry, and accepts the possibility that the poet serves as a scientist of human emotion. “The universe of knowledge and reason clearly enthralls Sor Juana,” continues Merrim, “the universe of love, construed as its counterface, would exercise an equal fascination for the poet as well as provide opportunities for a wide variety of poetic effects and registers. Hence, among other reasons, the sheer bulk of her love poetry” (Early 54).
Reading Sor Juana’s love poetry with the idea that the poet is not fulfilling the need to express her own emotions, but instead, studying the emotions of love through the poetic genre of love, adds to the understanding of the poet as an artist and an artisan.13

Love, in Sor Juana’s poetry, is often an object of study, a theme prime for lyrical exploitation. In a poem written as a counter-argument to a poem by D. José Montoro, Sor Juana argues that jealousy is a part of love, and indeed, it is the emotion which shows love to be real. Without any pretense that she herself is in love, the poem participates in a dialogue of what love is and what aspects constitute love. Love is dissected, its symptoms diagnosed, and in the language of love, in rhyme and in meter, it is decided, within the poem, that jealousy in love is inevitable. Sor Juana begins her argument by stating of jealousy:

Son ellos, de que hay amor,
el signo más manifiesto,
como la humedad del agua
y como el humo del fuego. (poem 3, 1: 9, 9-12)

That there is love, they are / the most manifest sign, / like humidity is of water / and smoke is of fire.

13 According to Merrim, it also adds to the understanding of the evolution of her work. Merrim proposes studying Sor Juana’s love poetry as a study of the world of unreason, or what she terms the “underworld of passion” (Early 53) within the realm of reason. She sees Sor Juana’s love poetry as a necessary step towards her masterpiece, El Sueño. “That is, we can view Sor Juana’s love poetry as part of an incremental philosophical inquiry,” states Merrim, “as the necessary first step toward the Sueño in both chronological and conceptual terms. My contention assumes greater credibility when we take into account the fact that the Sueño was one of Sor Juana’s last humanistic works and her self-stated most personal poem, summa and capstone of her efforts” (Early 54). The direction of Sor Juana’s work, then, would be through the in vogue topic of love and its unreason in order to reach an understanding of the limitations of the human intellect. However, due to the lack of knowledge of the production dates of Sor Juana’s texts, this is problematic. Sor Juana never records what year the work on El Sueño began and ended, making it impossible to ascertain when other works were written in relation to it.
After clearly stating that jealousy is an intrinsic part of love, Sor Juana goes on to discuss the way that love can be faked: through words and actions, but never through jealousy. According to the nun, jealousy is the only thing that can be ascertained to be honest since jealousy is completely irrational. Since in the nun's view the irrational lacks the capacity to lie, she states:

Sólo los celos ignoran 
fábricas de fingimientos:
que, como son locos, tienen
propiedad de verdaderos. . . (41-44)
Como de razón carecen,
carecen del instrumento
de fingir, que aquesto sólo
es en lo irracional bueno. (1: 10, 49-52)

Only jealousy is ignored / by the makers of deceptions: / for, because
they are mad, they have / the quality of being truthful. . . / Because they
lack reason, / they lack the instrument / of deception. This / is the only
good in the irrational.

Sor Juana clearly places jealousy in the realm of the irrational. According to the poet, the only thing good in the irrational is that it is honest. Jealousy, therefore, is a feeling that inasmuch as it lies completely outside of reason, it is the only sign that love can give to verify its honesty.

The nun, however, does not believe that this logic is sufficient to prove her point. In order to demonstrate that she is correct in her opinion, Sor Juana enlists the literary tradition of love by listing all of the famous figures that faked love, but not jealousy. She states,

En prueba de esta verdad
mírense cuantos ejemplos
en bibliotecas de siglos

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guarda el archivo del tiempo. (1: 10, 61-64)

As proof of this truth / look at how many examples / in the libraries of ages / the archives of time keep.

With this statement, Sor Juana then begins to list the deeds of those who lied about the veracity of their love. The list includes Aeneas, Delilah, Judith, and Jason among others. According to Sor Juana, these individuals feigned love and affection in order to achieve their goals. These mythical figures, claims Sor Juana, did not feign jealousy because they could not; their love was not real.

In this poem, the first time the first person is utilized in the poem is line 105 and the first instance of “yo” occurs in line 129. It is not until the author addresses directly the author against whom she is arguing that the “yo” of the poem becomes more then the voice that critiques love and jealousy. Regardless of whether she is occupying a personal “yo” or a rhetorical “yo,” the voice of the poem is clearly not a voice in love.

In line 253, Sor Juana finally addresses the recipient of this poem. She begins her address by complimenting her opponent, by stating “¡Oh doctisimo Montoro, / asombro de nuestros tiempos” (253-254) ‘Oh wise Montoro, / wonder of our times.” The poet then goes on to state that though Montoro did a fine job of showing that jealousy had no place in love, he logically could prove it through his argumentation but not make it believable. She states

bien se ve que sólo fué
la empresa de tus talentos
el probar lo más difícil,
no persuadir a creerlo! (261-265)
It can be easily seen that it was only / the undertaking of your talents / to prove the most difficult, / not persuade anyone to believe it!

With this stanza, Sor Juana dismisses Montoro’s argument as rhetorically correct, but unbelievable in reality. Love, apparently, can be proven to have jealousy as an intrinsic part or not, but despite both options being provable, only one of those options is actually believable.

After further praising her fellow writer’s skill for a couple of stanzas, Sor Juana states that her own volition would have led her to argue what she is instead arguing against. She states

Confieso que de mejor gana siguiera mi genio el extravagante rumbo de tu no hollado sendero. 
Pero, sobre ser difícil, inaccesible lo has hecho; pues el mayor imposible fuera ir en tu seguimiento. (289-296)

I confess that with better spirits my instinct would follow the extravagant route of your untrampled path. But, more than it being difficult, you have made it inaccessible; because the greater impossibility would be for me to go following you.

Here, the first instance where the “yo” of the poem seems to be the author in actuality, Sor Juana states that she would much rather argue that jealousy has no place in love. However, according to the poet, though her own nature would rather propose a rational version of love, her pride bars her from being able to follow in the footsteps of her fellow author. This statement, though quite simple and straightforward, raises questions about what this poet writes of love. If she, in this case, has argued against what she
herself would like to argue because of the fact that someone has argued it before her, how much honesty is there in her opinion of love? Does the nun approach her love poetry simply as if it were a part of a discourse? Does the poet propose what she believes to be true or what she finds to be more agreeable? If in her love poetry, Sor Juana finds an outlet for her life's emotions, what emotion is being expressed here?

These questions are further complicated when we see that the poet does refer to herself as being jealous, but not because of love. She states,

La opinión que yo quería
seguir, seguíste primero;
disteme celos, y tuve
la contraria con tenerlos. (301-305)

The opinion that I wanted / to follow, you followed first; / you made me jealous, and / I oppose you in having it.

The author herself suffers from jealousy, but only in that the other author has taken the perspective on love and jealousy that she would have preferred to take. The nun states nothing of love. The jealousy that is felt is due solely to intellectual possibilities that have presented themselves. Having stated jealousy to be irrational in nature, Sor Juana admits to suffering from it, but not in relation to the irrationality of love.

Clearly, Sor Juana rationally thinks of love and its constitution. In this poem, she does not speak of personal experience with love but, instead, speaks of general knowledge of love through mythical love affairs. What Sor Juana brings to the

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14 In this same vein, one of the most forceful poems Sor Juana has written is about grief. The poem 9.11 (1: 31) depicts a speaker who, overwhelmed with a despair larger than life, has to coax him or herself to grieve openly. This poem never mentions what has caused such emotional affliction. In a diagnostic manner, the poem focuses on the nature of anguish and the speaker's attempts to deal with it. It is in this manner that Sor Juana writes of love, not concerned with what motivates it, but on the symptoms and on the way that the lovers or loved ones deal with the situation.
discourse of love is an analytical and classically educated notion that love as a natural force can be studied through poetry. This can be seen in another poem where, through the voice of the lady who finds herself in a love triangle, Sor Juana speaks of a love that does not follow what reason dictates. In this poem, her love for Fabio is unrequited in the same way that Silvio’s love for her remains unreciprocated. She states

Manda la razón de estado 
que, atendiendo a obligaciones,
las partes de Fabio olvide,
las prendas de Silvio adore (poem 4, 1: 18, 17-20)

Reason of status mandates / that, attending to obligations, / I forget the parts of Fabio, / and adore Silvio’s trinkets.

Reason tells the speaker of the poem to ignore the man who ignores her and to adore the man who adores her. Clearly inscribed within the limits of the text is the idea of obligations, the societal aspects of love and courting. The lady, despite her feelings, has the responsibility to obey the rules of society, her obligations, in her treatment of these two men.

Within this poem of love, the preoccupation lies with fulfilling societal expectations and maintaining a good reputation. This can be seen as the next stanza goes on:

o que, al menos, si no puedo
vencer tan fuertes pasiones,
cenizas de disimulo
cubran amantes ardores; (21-24)

or, at least, if I cannot / overcome such strong passions, / [may] ashes of dissimulation / cover love’s ardor.
The speaker identifies the need to hide the flames of love in the cover of ashes.

Decorum becomes the focal point of her attempts. Later, Sor Juana echoes this sentiment when she states

¿Podrá mi noble altivez
consentir que mis acciones
de nieve y de fuego, sirvan
de ser fábula del orbe? (45-48)

Could my noble pride / consent that my actions, / of snow and of fire, serve / as a fable to the world?

In this stanza, the speaker of the poem makes it clear that she has no desire for her situation to be made public; to serve as a fable in the way that Sor Juana uses so many classical tales of love as fables in her texts. The lady’s task, now, seems to transform her emotions, taking herself out of the situation in which she finds herself; or, failing the first, hiding her emotions so as not to let her dilemma become public.

The poem proceeds, speaking of her love for Fabio and her inability to reciprocate Silvio’s love. Never does the poem speak of the men themselves or what she loves in Fabio and why she does not love Silvio. The poem maintains itself at an abstract level, never speaking of more than the most vague aspects of the emotions that surround a love triangle: the speaker curses fate, questions Silvio’s judgment, and studies the nature of love. The last third of the poem is where the speaker resigns herself to love and to be loved. Much as in the previous poem studied, in the end the poet affirms the irrational nature of love. Only when it is irrational in nature, claims the poet, is love pure and uninfluenced by other motivations. She states,
Quererlo porque él me quiere,  
no es justo que amor se nombre . . . (113-114)  
Quien ama porque es querida,  
sin otro impulso más noble,  
desprecia al amante y ama  
sus propias adoraciones. (121-124)  

To love him because he loves me, / it is not fair to call that love . . . / She  
who loves because she is loved, / without another more noble impulse, /  
scorns the lover and loves / her own worship.  

Simply stated, Sor Juana sees love as a force that cannot be reasoned with. Love, in its  
pure state, does not need reasons and cannot be compromised through the actions of  
others. As the speaker of the poem states, propriety demands certain behaviors. To  
prevent her emotions from making her an example for the world, like the many tragic  
mythical figures readily listed in other poems, she must behave in the prescribed  
manner. The irrational force of love, it is implied, should not compromise rational  
behavior. Despite her feelings, the speaker is to behave appropriately. In the nun’s love  
poetry, the theme of unrequited, yet inescapable, love is studied.  

Of course, the study of love in the poetry of Sor Juana does leave an overall  
picture of love and its problems. Never in the poetry of Sor Juana, or many other  
baroque writers, is there depicted a happy problem-free couple in love. The depiction of  
love is one filled with angst and turmoil. As Merrim states, “what emerges from an  
examination of the corpus of poems is an overriding picture of male-female love as a  
battleground that produces suffering; in other words, love as strife, discord, and  
disillusionment. For Sor Juana, love’s constitutive principles include jealousy . . . and . .  
.a mutability tantamount to that of fickle Fortune” (Early 57). Love, in the poems of
Sor Juana Inés, is a harrowing experience from which none emerge unscathed. The emphasis that the nun places on the irrational aspect of love, the helplessness of reason in the face of desire, makes love the ultimate tyrant. Coupled with Sor Juana’s personal rejection of mundane love, the portrait of love that is created is basically negative.

“What renders heterosexual love so unredeemable, so despicable?” asks Merrim, “... Sor Juana does not, as one might expect from a nun, condemn the pleasures of the flesh. Rather, she repeatedly excoriates the sin razon or Unreason of love, which in robbing them of their intelligence can (as a follower of Saint Thomas would naturally see it) reduce humans to beasts” (Early 59). In the eyes of the poet as can be gleaned from her poems, love has no luster because it diminishes the thing that Sor Juana prizes the most in humans: intellect.¹⁵

Sor Juana’s treatment of the topic of love, though it is a full participation in the tradition of courtly love, does tend to favor certain melancholic aspects of the genre. As it has been stated,

despite its encyclopedic sweep of the domain of courtly love, Sor Juana’s love poetry displays a predilection for certain phases in the courtly process. It favors not the initial and hopeful stages of enamorment, but the later phases of the precador and servidor. That is to say, of those who have known love in all its force and verbalize their complaints and laments, often directly to the beloved. (Merrim Early 56)

¹⁵ It is in the persona of the lover, suffering in a diminished state of intellect, that Sor Juana writes some of her most recognized love poetry. Sor Juana, in poem 6 (1: 23), written bemoaning the absence of a lover, a poem written in full and dramatic baroque overstatement, ends the poem with the declaration: “Y a Dios; que, con el ahogo / que me embarga los alientos, / ni sé ya lo que te digo / ni lo que te escribo leo” (105-108) ‘And to God; that, with the drowning / that hampers my breath, / I do not know what I say to you / nor what I write to you do I read.’ Amazingly enough, proclamations such as these have been used to sustain the idea that Sor Juana wrote instinctively, without taking the time to read what she wrote.
It seems that although the nun found love interesting enough to write about, she did not find it endearing enough to praise it. Focusing her works on the latter parts of love, in the stages where the lover no longer feels satisfied by his love and his beloved, Sor Juana further emphasizes the role of love as tyrannical, selfish, and cold. Could these poems be studies of love as a disillusionment: a Jeromian view of earthly affection?\textsuperscript{16} Sor Juana never clearly states any disapproval toward love, yet her poems make it hard to believe that there is any happiness to be found in it.

The poetry of love that Sor Juana writes leaves the impression of having emotion but no lovers. The focus is on love and the feelings that surround it: the people, I would argue, are vague images, their personalities unimportant, their characteristics unmentioned. What the poet is curious about, obviously, is the expression of the strong emotions that are found through love. The love poetry depicts a fascination on behalf of the nun towards love and its struggles. The personal psychology, the state of emotion of the nun, is irrelevant to the poetry. In the process of pleasing her patrons, Sor Juana finds a way to participate fully in the literary tradition of courtly love, while, at the same time, providing a patchwork treatise on the nature of love. The approach that Sor Juana uses to study the realm of love shows how completely professional the nun was in her writing. The ability to manipulate words the nun displays in her love poetry, as seen through the use of technique and rhetoric, should alert us not just to possible dishonesty, but to probable dishonesty.

\textsuperscript{16} The next chapter will provide a brief study of St. Jerome's view of earthly affections.
Chapter 4. Sor Juana's Participation in the Scholastic Tradition

Sor Juana utilized the Scholastic Tradition to support her claim that she had a right to write. Sor Juana creates a public image of herself that followed the writings of the Church. In her writings, she is careful to depict herself as submissive and proper. The nun relied on canonical texts that exalted the position of virgins in society. Sor Juana's personal rejection of the societal role of women did in no way go against tradition. Difficult to grasp by today's standards, Sor Juana's dismissal of the familial bonds, of the role of women as mothers and wives, is well within the confines of religious tradition. Her complete objection to marriage, as clearly stated in the Respuesta, is theologically sound and it is due to this rejection of the feminine function of wife that Sor Juana is free to participate in the intellectual world of men. According to Sor Juana, it is the negation of body in light of canonical texts that allows her to transcend gender limitations. She is a Hieronymite nun and it is in the writings of St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom that she finds the proof to support this notion.

By eschewing the role of women as mothers and wives, and in clinging to an asexual existence, Sor Juana does nothing more than follow the advice of those Church Fathers. Sor Juana used the writings of two Church Fathers, Jerome and Chrysostom, to differentiate between gender and sex. It is according to the writing of these two saints that a female can transcend the social limitations prescribed to her state if she should reject the social function as a woman. The liberation of her sex, then comes through the rejection of gender. Sor Juana is free to follow her intellectual inclinations by turning away from her role as a woman. In this way, by basing her choices on the holy writings,
the poet can depict her choice to live as a nun as a liberating force that frees her from
the restrictions placed on women in the intellectual and the literary realms. This
safeguards her from the most severe of possible criticisms for a woman and a nun:
those based on religious impropriety.

Sor Juana’s position, as a nun and a woman of low birth, did not allow her the
protection necessary to write freely. Sor Juana’s stance, that women and men had equal
intellectual capacities, was considered by some to be improper ideology for a nun. Sor
Juana defended herself from censorship through the political shelter granted by her
patrons and by staying within the confines of the accepted literary traditions. As a nun,
no tradition could be more important to her than the Scholastic Tradition as founded by
the Church Fathers.

**In Self-defense**

Central in any discussion over Sor Juana’s view of women’s intellectual
equality and participation in the Scholastic tradition is the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*,
written in 1691. This text is composed as self-defense after a public scolding from an
archbishop. In this letter, which is her only admittedly autobiographical piece, Sor
Juana displays herself and her academic pursuits using a rhetoric of subservience to
claim innocuousness. This text, however, is more than a defense of herself as an
individual: it defends women’s education by delineating a female literary tradition of
which she is part. Sor Juana lists classical figures, like Minerva, Arete, and Nicostrata,
among others, to support her opinion that an interest in intellectual pursuits can coexist
with female virtue. She proved this point by citing classical precedents where famous
women had the fame of being both wise and righteous women. Sor Juana’s use of feminine ancient figures will be studied in detail later when discussing the tradition of the Speculum. Sor Juana cites the works of religious authorities such as St. Teresa, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. Paul, and St. Jerome to support her argument that women indeed had a role in religious education. All of this she does to critique the social conventions that limited women’s education. By including figures from the Bible as well as Catholic saints, she strengthens her argument in a way that makes it impossible to refute on theological grounds.

In 1690, Sor Juana wrote a letter refuting the theological claims made in a 1650 sermon given by a very prominent Jesuit of the times, Antonio de Vieyra. According to Sor Juana, the letter refuting the published sermon was written at the behest of a bishop and was meant only for private circulation. The letter, however, reached the hands of the Bishop of Puebla, Don Manuel Fernández de Santacruz y Sahagún, who decided to publish the letter at his own expense. The letter was published under the title of Carta Atenagórica, or Letter Worthy of Athena,1 with a prologue entitled Carta de Sor Filotea de la Cruz, a letter penned by the Bishop of Puebla critiquing Sor Juana’s work. Under the guise of being a fellow nun, or Sor Filotea de la Cruz, the bishop critiques Sor Juana’s apparent lack of decorum in criticizing not only a man but a well-known Jesuit scholar.2 It is impossible to believe that Sor Juana was unaware that it was a superior

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1 This translation of that title is provided by Kirk (16).

2 Octavio Paz maintains that this indeed is how it occurred, that in publication the Carta Atenagórica “iba precedida por otra, dirigida a Sor Juana y firmada por una Sor Filotea de la Cruz, monja en convento poblano” (518) ‘was preceded by another, addressed to Sor Juana and signed by a Sor Filotea de la Cruz, a nun in a rural convent.’ Ilan Stavans, however, in the introduction he provided for Margaret
who critiqued her. The intention of the bishop in writing in the guise of a nun is to
depict his criticism as coming from a much more decorous peer.

The critique did not ask Sor Juana to abandon her studies, as some had before, it only asked for the focus of her writings to change: from the popular baroque themes and styles to those of a religious and more demure nature. Referring to the opinion that women should not be allowed to study at all, Sor Filotea states “no pretendo, según este dictamen, que V. md. mude el genio renunciando los libros, sino que le mejore, leyendo alguna vez el de Jesucristo. . . . Mucho tiempo ha gastado V. md. en el estudio de filósofos y poetas; ya será razón que se perfeccionen los empleos y que mejoren los libros.” (Santa Cruz 695) ‘I do not pretend, according to this dictate, that Your Grace transform your character by abandoning books, but only that you improve it by reading the book of Jesus Christ. . . . Too much time has Your Grace spent in the study of philosophers and poets; that will be reason that your applications be perfected and that the books be improved.’ Sor Filotea criticizes the worldliness of Sor Juana’s secular writings as well as Sor Juana’s choice of endeavor in learning humane letters and not, as is befitting of a nun according to the bishop’s standards, those texts which would better her soul.

Peden’s translation of some of Sor Juana’s works, states that the Bishop of Puebla published the Carta Atenagórica first, and then “either by his own personal choice or encouraged by higher authorities, decided to write a letter to Sor Juana” (xiv) after a controversy had started. This is less likely.

3 Some had already attempted to silence Sor Juana. As George Tavard notes: “the secular topics of much of her poetry, composed at the request of persons at the viceroyal court and, often, of the vicereine herself, brought Juana into conflict with her confessor, the Jesuit Antonio Núñez de Miranda. . . . He ordered her to abandon all writing, and he even complained in public about her unbecoming self-pride. In a letter that has been preserved, she dismissed him as her confessor” (6-7). It is this type of criticism that Sor Juana had to guard herself against.
The *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, written three months later in 1691, was directed specifically toward the bishop while maintaining the pretense of him being a nun. Though the letter was addressed to a nun (whom Sor Juana knew to be the bishop), Sor Juana was participating in public discussion. As the critique was public (in that it was published alongside the *Carta Atenagórica*), necessarily the response would be also. The letter in response to Sor Filotea is the only explicit self-defense Sor Juana wrote. Sor Juana argues, while displaying a broad knowledge of the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers, that a woman had the right to be educated and to write. She also argues that there is no virtue lost in pursuing knowledge for any soul of either sex. It is vital to read this letter with the awareness that Sor Juana would create an image of herself that protected her from criticism. As it is aptly noted:

> la naturaleza evidentemente autobiográfica y epistolar del texto resulta importante al tomar en cuenta que en la autobiografía el sujeto se postula como objeto de la autoreflexión, mientras que a la vez se constituye en un discurso que será leído por otros. Por lo tanto, esta autoreflexión del sujeto queda enmarcada en la necesidad de transmitir cierta imagen a otro. (Martínez-San Miguel 271)

The self-evident autobiographical and epistolary nature of this text happens to be important in considering that in the autobiography the subject proposes herself as an object of auto-reflection while at the same time it is constituting a discourse that will be read by others. In as much, this auto-reflection of the subject is framed in the necessity to transmit a certain image to others.

Even in the autobiographic writings of the nun, it is impossible to get away from the fact that she needed to present herself as following all rules of decorum.

The letter from Sor Filotea, however, is not the first criticism that Sor Juana faces in her career; in fact, it is close to her last. After a career of being very adept at
handling both her critics and her admirers, Sor Juana sums up her experience in the

*Respuesta.* Referring to the happiness that wide acclaim should have brought her, Sor Juana states,

> Pues Dios sabe que no ha sido muy asi, porque entre las flores de esas mismas aclamaciones se han levantado y despertado tales áspides de emulaciones y persecuciones, cuantas no podré contar, y los que más nocivos y sensibles para mi han sido, no son aquéllos que con declarado odio y malevolencia me han perseguido, sino los que amándome y deseando mi bien (y por ventura, mereciendo mucho con Dios por la buena intención), me han mortificado y atormentado más que los otros, con aquel: *No conviene a la santa ignorancia que deben, este estudio; se ha de perder, se ha de desvanecer en tanta altura con su misma perspicacia y agudeza.* (Respuesta 4: 452)

He [God] knows how from amongst the blossoms of this very acclaim emerged such a number of aroused vipers, hissing their emulation and their persecution, that one could not count them. But the most noxious, those who most deeply wounded me, have not been those who persecuted me with open loathing and malice, but rather those who in loving me and desiring my well-being (and who are deserving of God’s blessing for their good intent) have mortified and tormented me more than those others with their abhorrence. “Such studies are not in conformity with sacred innocence; surely she will be lost; surely she will, by cause of her very perspicacity and acuity, grow heady at such exalted heights.” (Peden *Poems* 29)

With this statement, Sor Juana makes two things obvious. First, she makes it clear that there has been a constant stream of criticism throughout her career as a writer. Second, she states that though some criticism is extremely harsh and hateful (“con declarado odio y malevolencia”), the criticism that she finds most threatening is that which posed as friendly and caring advice. This, of course, is directly aimed at the Bishop of Puebla, in his pose as Sor Filotea de la Cruz, as a commentary on his tactic of criticism.
In her *Respuesta*, while Sor Juana maintains the charade of participating in a discourse between peers, Sor Juana notes that the critique of her writing has been constant yet futile. The nun states that the criticism has come at all times and from all angles. However, none of these criticisms, from friends or foes, had any impact on Sor Juana.

Sor Juana does not hesitate to state that the criticism of her is a result of jealousy; that those who chastise her do so for no other reason than to “aborrecer al que se señala porque desluce a otros. Así sucede y así sucedió siempre” (*Respuesta* 4: 453) ‘abhor one who excels, because he deprives others of regard. And thus it happens, and thus it has always happened’ (*Peden Poems* 29). This theme, of shameless persecution brought on by jealousy, is also found in some of her poetry. In her sonnet “En perseguirme, Mundo, ¿qué interesas?” (Cruz, poem 146, 1: 277) ‘In my pursuit, World, why such diligence?’ (*Peden Poems* 171), Sor Juana asks why anyone would be so impacted by her pursuit of knowledge that they would be offended and attempt to stifle her. Throughout this poem she handles the negative attention which she has received in a very humorous way. In Sor Juana’s life, the constant criticism and the displeasure of her superiors constantly threatened her ability to write and study in peace.

Sor Juana further alludes to the madness surrounding her situation in life by showing how her situation is unique among authors. She states, “¡Rara demencia: cansarse más en quitarse el crédito que pudiera en granjearlo!” (Cruz *Respuesta* 4: 472) ‘A strange madness, to expend more effort in denying acclaim than in earning it!’ (*Peden Poems* 69). Sor Juana clearly states that she expends more energy in minimizing
the praise given to her for her writing than in the writing itself. This argument fits in
with the rhetoric, already discussed in Chapter II, that she does not spend much time or
energy premeditating or perfecting her writing and only writes out of a desire to please
others. Through these arguments, Sor Juana reinforces the image of herself as a natural,
effusive writer and concretizes the idea that her accusers are simply off the mark in
believing her to have a deeper interest in her own writing. Sor Juana, in her rhetoric of
effusiveness, states that it takes her no energy at all to write. Of course, when referring
to her critics, she wonders about the amount of energy and time it takes them to
formulate their critiques. Obviously, Sor Juana’s response is a path lined with thorns for
those who choose to criticize. After having made it clear, as pointed out earlier, that the
criticism is motivated by jealousy, Sor Juana clarifies the situation by indirectly stating
that her critics are simply not as gifted as she is. They lack her effusiveness, and so,
their writing is labored.

By calling attention to her critique of a clergyman, the Bishop of Puebla brought
the rising disapproval of Sor Juana’s writing to its apex. By publishing it alongside a
letter posing from a peer with a more virtuous disposition, the Bishop fed the flames of
censorship. After years of massive literary production, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz fell
silent and focused on her spiritual duties. It is not known whether this change was
brought about by the powers that be, through censorship,4 or whether, as many

4 Among the critics and biographers who insist on a scenario in which Sor Juana was forced to
stop writing are Ezequiel A. Chávez, who wrote that Sor Juana is made to stop writing due to a (hard to
detect) politically revolutionary content of her poetry (in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: su vida y su obra,
Barcelona: Ed. Araluce, 1931) and Paz, who creates a picture in which Sor Juana is silenced due to
"envidia, temor, odio a la mujer, recelo" (557) ‘envy, fear, hatred toward women, jealousy.’
biographers believe, the change came about due to a personal decision on Sor Juana’s part to devote herself to her faith and to her salvation. There is an interesting third alternative offered by Pamela Kirk in her study of Sor Juana. Kirk proposes the idea that Sor Juana may have planned a temporary reprieve from her writing due to religious reasons. The nun's silence coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of her vows and may have been intended as a “year of scrutiny” or “aprobación,” to commemorate the occasion. Kirk states that “her death in an epidemic just a month after this penitential year would have ended makes it impossible to ascertain whether she would have resumed writing as before or not” (148). The fact that an unfinished secular poem was found in Sor Juana’s cell after her death, rends support to this theory. This poem was dedicated to the praise she received as an author and destined to be included in a new collection of poetry, making it all the more unlikely that Sor Juana had truly quit the writing business. Though in 1692 the first edition of the second volume of her works was published in Seville, from 1692 to her death in 1695 Sor Juana wrote only a handful of texts, all religious in nature and for the limited use of the convent. Her Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz was posthumously published in her third volume of works published in Madrid in 1700.

By virtue of its being the only clearly non-fiction text she writes, in this letter she creates the context in which to place all of her writings. Sor Juana’s attempt to convince the reader of her innocence, of her humility and orthodoxy, is coupled with

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5 Among the list of biographers who believe that Sor Juana stopped writing for the sake of the life of her soul are Mirta Aguirre, Anita Arroyo, Julio Jiménez Rueda, Georgina Sabat Rivers in her introduction to Inundación Castalída, and Elizabeth Wallace.
her impressive display of both secular and religious knowledge. This letter is the only place where Sor Juana presents a demarcation of the traditions which she aspires to follow. Her participation in the Scholastic tradition, although seen in other texts, is emphasized in this letter through a listing of the saints and renowned clergymen and their writings upon which Sor Juana relies for theological support.

In this letter, Sor Juana deals directly with the issue of whether it was morally correct for women to participate in intellectual endeavors. Sor Juana gives the opinion of a contemporary scholar, “el venerable Doctor Arce,” who,

finally he resolves, with all prudence, that teaching publicly from a University chair, or preaching from the pulpit, is not permissible for women; but that to study, write, and teach privately not only is permissible, but most advantageous and useful. It is evident that this is not to be the case with all women, but with those to whom God may have granted special virtue and prudence, and who may be well advanced in learning, and having the essential talent and requisites for such a sacred calling. (Peden Poems 49)

In this way, there are no doubts that what the nun is arguing is theologically sound. The limitations of women are defined clearly in this quote: women may study but not preach. By making this clear, however, Sor Juana is aware that it is not enough to secure her position. Sor Juana continues to protect herself from a negative public opinion and political pressures. Her right to write is not just a matter of dogma.
Sor Juana does more than use the theology of the Church Fathers to support her own behavior. Sor Juana also utilizes the mythology surrounding their persons to justify her own actions. Though this letter is the only clearly autobiographical piece Sor Juana ever wrote, it is difficult to read as completely honest in content. Throughout the letter, Sor Juana represents herself and her life in such a way as to mirror Biblical and religious stories and thus fits her life story into patterns found throughout sacred writings. In the opening of her letter, excusing the tardiness of her response to the public critique, the nun likens herself to St. Thomas Aquinas. She states, "y si ve que preguntado el Angel de las Escuelas, Santo Tomás, de su silencio con Alberto Magno, su maestro, respondió que callaba porque nada sabia decir digno de Alberto, con cuánta mayor razón callaría, no como el Santo, de humildad, sino que en la realidad es no saber algo digno de vos" (Cruz Respuesta 4:440) ‘for when I see that when Saint Thomas, the Angelic Doctor of Scholasticism, was asked about his silence with his teacher Albertus Magnus, he replied that he had not spoken because he knew nothing to say worthy of Albertus. With so much greater reason must I be silent: not like the Saint, out of humility, but rather, it really is not knowing something worthy of you.’ Sor Juana begins her letter by utilizing an anecdote of a saint’s life to excuse her own conduct. With a mixture of rhetoric, she creates a position of teacher/student between her accuser and herself. She states that nothing she can say would be worthy of her teacher. In light of her elevated status as an author, it is hard to imagine that this statement is not meant to call attention to the fact that Albertus Magnus, the teacher, though wise, is not revered in the way as St. Thomas Aquinas, the student. Nevertheless, she clarifies that
unlike the Saint who stated that he knew of nothing worthy to say, she really did know nothing to say. As if to show the rhetorical nature of that comment, Sor Juana proceeds to write what can be arguably called one of the finest defenses of women and their right to an education.

When referring to the idea that she should focus her studies on religious texts, Sor Juana explains that she indeed believed the same thing but found that other things stood in her way. Her agreement shows that when she began her line of study, she had the intention of focusing on theology. She states of her studies,

Bien que yo procuraba elevarlo cuanto podia y dirigirlo a su servicio, porque el fin a que aspiraba era a estudiar Teologia, pareciéndome menguada inhabilidad, siendo catolica, no saber todo lo que en esta vida se puede alcanzar, por medios naturales, de los divinos misterios; y qué siendo monja y no seglar, debia, por el estado eclesiastico, profesar letras; y mas siendo hija de un San Jerónimo y de una Santa Paula, que era degenerar de tan doctos padres ser idiota la hija. Esto me proponia yo de mi misma y me parecia razón. (Cruz Respuesta 4: 447)

I strove mightily to elevate these studies, to dedicate them to His service, as the goal to which I aspired was to study Theology—it seeming to me debilitating for a Catholic not to know everything in this life of the Divine Mysteries that can be learned through natural means—and, being a nun and not a layperson, it was seemly that I profess my vows to learning through ecclesiastical channels; and especially, being a daughter of a Saint Jerome and a Saint Paula, it was essential that such erudite parents not be shamed by a witless daughter. This is the argument I proposed to myself, and it seemed to me well-reasoned. (Peden Poems 17).

Clearly, Sor Juana believed that the ecclesiastical channels could lead her to a deeper kind of knowledge. She states that it would be only logical finding herself in a convent of St. Jerome and St. Paula, both renowned for their study of theology, that she would also be a devoted student.
In the *Respuesta*, Sor Juana summarizes the bishop’s argument, presenting it as her own, and then proceeds to find its flaws. The wholehearted agreement the nun has with the criticism made of her is immediately followed by the assertion that the study of religious texts would be the equivalent in merit to the study of secular texts since either would be motivated by the desire to satisfy her curiosity. She states, “si no es que era (y eso es lo más cierto) lisonjear y aplaudir a mi propia inclinación, proponiéndola como obligatorio su propio gusto” (Cruz *Respuesta* 4: 447) ‘it was, however (and this cannot be denied) merely glorification and approbation of my inclination, and enjoyment of it offered as justification’ (Peden *Poems* 19). With this statement, Sor Juana shows that even following such a pious course as studying theology, she is still a victim of her own inclinación and thus following an appetite no less worldly than in studying nonecclesiastical writings. This argument, that regardless of what she studies she is merely satisfying her earthly hunger, makes the contention of her critic as ignoble as what he is criticizing. Having made the study of both the “good” works (religious) and the “bad” works (secular) equally selfish and signs of a weak nature, Sor Juana can ignore the suggestions of the Bishop by stating no good solution has been given.

Sor Juana then gives reasons why secular works are worthy of study. The nun lists the many different questions that arise from reading the Bible. She asks: how do you answer these questions without secular knowledge? Thus, geometry becomes vital knowledge if one wants to measure the Holy Ark of the Covenant and the Holy City of Jerusalem (Cruz *Respuesta* 4: 448). Indeed, the idea that the Holy Scriptures should be read, and understood, with help from profane knowledge, either philosophical or
factual, is held by St. Augustine. In his prologue to *On Christian Doctrine*, he states that rather than relying solely on God-given understanding of the Scriptures (which may or may not come), that "those things which can be learned from men should be learned without pride" (5). In this statement, St. Augustine includes the teachings of saints as well as the philosophic foundation based on Platonic texts. With this accepted logic, Sor Juana justifies her desire to learn of things outside of the Bible. She also states that all things emanate from God: "todas las cosas salen de Dios, que es el centro a un tiempo y la circunferencia de donde salen y donde paran todas las líneas criadas" (Cruz Respuesta 4: 450) 'all things issue from God, Who is at once the center and the circumference from which and in which all lines begin and end' (Peden Poems 23).

This rebuttal completely rejects the argument that there exists knowledge not worth knowing, since all knowledge is divine in origin. This follows St. Augustine’s statement in *On Christian Doctrine*, "for no one should consider anything his own, except perhaps a lie, since all truth is from Him who said, 'I am the truth'” (6). Sor Juana constructs her argument, that a secular education does not threaten the virtue of a woman, around the notion that all things are from God, and so are unquestionably good.

Since all things are from God, including her own intellectual gifts, Sor Juana makes the argument that if God had wanted no women to be intellectually active, then God would have only granted the ability to be so to men. She states of her intellectual talents, "este natural impulso que Dios puso en mí: Su Majestad sabe por qué y para qué" (Cruz Respuesta 4: 444) 'this natural impulse that God placed in me: the Lord God knows why, and for what purpose' (Peden Poems 11). By stating that her abilities are
God-given, she attempts to remove the idea that she has done something wrong: she is simply a recipient of a mysterious grace. With this argument, she can portray those who critique her as attempting to stifle what God has desired.

However, Sor Juana does not limit her biblical analogies to herself alone: even the work that created all the commotion, the *Carta Atenagórica*, is given a biblical treatment. Of the letter, Sor Juana states, “y creo que si pudiera haber prevenido el dichoso destino a que nacía—pues, como a otro Moisés, la arrojé expósita a las aguas del Nilo del silencio, donde la halló y acarició una princesa como vos—; creo, vuelvo a decir, que si yo tal pensara, la ahogara antes entres las mismas manos en que nacía” (Cruz Respuesta 4: 471) ‘and I believe that had I foreseen the blessed destiny to which it was fated—for like a second Moses I had set it adrift, naked, on the waters of the Nile of silence, where you, a princess, found and cherished it—I believe, I reiterate, that had I known, the very hands of which it was born would have drowned it’ (Peden Poems 67). Following the notion that her writings are her only progeny, Sor Juana patterns the life of the letter to that of Moses. Of special interest are the details that can be found in her Biblical analogy. Of course, there is no way that an argument could be made that Moses would have been better off drowned. Fully ironic, this statement leads to the conclusion that like Moses, the letter was intended to live and overturn the hierarchy which fostered it. Like the princess in the Old Testament, the Bishop rescues the letter from obscurity and, like Moses, the letter fights against injustice.

Sor Juana, with no uncertain terms, places the blame for the publishing of the letter on the Bishop, which she refers to as “una princesa como vos.” The analogy
continues and the Bishop plays the role of the princess, giving the comparison a bit of humor since the world in which Sor Juana lived and wrote was not a place where a Bishop, or any man, was willing to be referred to as *princesa*. The Bishop’s chosen guise as a nun, however, makes this analogy possible. Before all else, Sor Juana emphasizes her helplessness; she, though the author, does not write out of her own volition and is published according to the whim of others. Sor Juana places herself and her writings, as she had in the introductory poem for the first volume of her works, at the mercy of those in power. In comparing the letter to Moses, however, though her situation is still powerless she is securely in the right.

Sor Juana proceeds to ridicule the amount of energy it has taken the accusers to launch their accusations. She portrays the zeal with which her critics attack her to be illogical. She states, “lo que si es de ponderar es el trabajo que le ha costado el andar haciendo traslados” (Cruz *Respuesta* 4: 472) ‘what is a matter to be weighed is the effort spent in copying the accusation’ (Peden *Poems* 69). Is this a jab at the Bishop of Puebla for the expense he personally incurred in printing the *Carta Atenagórica* and the *Carta de Sor Filotea de la Cruz* for the sole purpose of criticizing her? In any case, Sor Juana directs the attention of the reader to the obsessive way in which she is being persecuted. Following the Biblical analogy she made earlier, Sor Juana states that her letter, like Moses, at first fully unworthy, since it had been chosen and favored to receive attention, has the strength to ask the impossible. She states that “no se hallaba digno Moisés, por balbuciente, para hablar con Faraón, y después, el verse tan favorecido de Dios, le infunde tales alientos, que no sólo habla con el mismo Dios, sino
que se atreve a pedirle imposibles” (Cruz Respuesta 4: 472) ‘because he was halting of speech, Moses thought himself unworthy to speak with Pharaoh, but after he found himself highly favored of God, and thus inspired, he not only spoke with God Almighty but dared ask the impossible’ (Peden Poems 7). The fact that Sor Juana never states that her Carta Atenagórica is worthy of the attention that it received safeguards her from the accusation of arrogance. However, placing this letter in the position of Moses is not the most humble of acts. This can be overlooked as she uses this analogy to state that it is the grace and attention that the letter has received that has given her the right to ask what she might never have had the opportunity to ask had her letter not been printed: why should a woman not lead an intellectual life? Her defense of women’s education, therefore, is grounded on the fact that the publication of her letter caused so much controversy.

Sor Juana continues the game of charades with the Bishop of Puebla by pretending that the person who published the letter and the person to whom she is responding are separate entities. She writes:

. . . porque quien hizo imprimir la Carta tan sin noticia mía, quien la intituló, quien la costeó, quien la honró tanto (siendo de todo indigna por si la autora), ¿qué no hará?, ¿qué no perdonará?, ¿qué dejará de hacer y qué dejará de perdonar? Y así, debajo del supuesto de que hablo con el salvoconducto de vuestros favores y debajo del seguro de vuestra benignidad, . . . de concederme benévola licencia para hablar . . . (Cruz Respuesta 4: 442)

. . . for who was it who had my letter printed unbeknownst to me? Who entitled it, who bore the cost, who honored it, it being so unworthy in itself, and in its author? What will such a person not do, not pardon? What would he fail to do, or fail to pardon? And thus, based on the supposition that I speak under the safe-conduct of your favor, and with
the assurance of your benignity . . . conceding to me your benevolent license to speak . . . (Peden Poems 7-9)

These statements seem to state that, because she was given a right to speak through the publication of the letter, she has now only to secure Sor Filotea's blessing to continue. Of course, she treats Sor Filotea as a superior, she places herself in a submissive position requiring a 'safe-conduct' through this battlefield. The publishing of her letter is seen as an attack from someone who does not forgive the shortcomings of the author. Once again, Sor Juana emphasizes her helplessness in the matter.

Sor Juana challenges the charge that it is improper for a nun to write poetry. After listing many saints who have chosen to write in verse and naming parts of the Bible written in verse, Sor Juana asks “¿cuál es el daño que pueden tener ellos [versos] en sí?” (Cruz Respuesta 4: 470) ‘what harm is to be found in them [verses]?’ (Peden Poems 65). Having discarded the argument against poetry per se by demonstrating its importance in the canon, she then proceeds to the issue of gender. In the next paragraph, she states, “pues si está el mal en que los use una mujer, ya se ve cuántas los han usado loablemente; pues ¿en qué está el serlo yo? Confieso desde luego mi ruindad y vileza pero no juzgo que se habrá visto una copla mia indecente” (Cruz Respuesta 4: 470) ‘and if the evil is attributed to the fact that a woman employs them, we have seen how many have done so in praiseworthy fashion; what then is the evil in my being a woman? I confess openly my own baseness and meanness, but I judge that no couplet of mine has been deemed indecent’ (Peden Poems 65). Sor Juana makes it resoundingly clear that the question is one of gender. The Bishop is not criticizing poetry as a genre.
since it is an integral part of the canon. What Sor Juana makes clear is that the Bishop is criticizing the fact that she is a woman, specifically a nun, writing of secular issues. Having clarified this, Sor Juana relies on tradition to show the innocence of her endeavor. The nun leans on ecclesiastical figures to provide for her the texts to emulate and also the cult of saints and saints' lives that allow her a prototype that contradict the Bishop. Sor Juana shows that what the Bishop refers to as impious is an integral part of the religious canon.

The whole of the Respuesta is couched within Sor Juana's statement that she has no intention of defending herself against the accusations that the act of writing is impious for a woman in her position. Despite the fact that the Respuesta is studied as an autobiographical piece written in self-defense, Sor Juana states several times within the body of the letter that she will not write anything in her own defense.\(^6\) It becomes quite clear that Sor Juana has an interest in not having this text be interpreted as a defense of her actions in the light of these constant accusations. It seems very important to Sor Juana to maintain the charade of the Bishop: to have this letter read as unguarded correspondence, honest and without rhetoric, written by a nun for a nun.

Cooperating with the roles set up by the Bishop of Puebla, Sor Juana writes this letter as if it were a friendly epistle between two nuns, not as a defense against critics,

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against someone with authority over her, and/or possible censorship. Sor Juana holds that, “que, si no es interviniendo vuestros preceptos, lo que es por mi defensa nunca tomaré la pluma, porque me parece que no necesita de que otro le responda, quien en lo mismo que se oculta conoce su error” (Respuesta 4: 471-2) ‘for, if it does not run contrary to your will, my defense shall be not to take up my pen, for I deem that one affront need not occasion another, if one recognizes the error in the very place it lies concealed’ (Peden Poems 69). Sor Juana, here, is careful always to state that she has many faults. She states that she clearly sees where her faults are and is therefore unaffected by the criticism and does not need to defend herself. Using the same rhetoric of indifference and subservience found in her other writings on the subject, Sor Juana asserts that she has no interest in fame or in acknowledgment for her talent. She writes, she claims, to fulfill her obligation to others. In this case, Sor Juana states that she believes that her accusers deserve no response because she is only satisfying her responsibilities and has no personal interest at stake. The fact that this letter is indeed a response to the accusations made by Sor Filotea makes this statement very problematic when read autobiographically. However, it is such comments in light of their context that clearly demonstrate Sor Juana’s rhetoric in action.

Sor Juana asserts that her impulse is to leave these accusations unanswered but, of course, should Sor Filotea think it better for Sor Juana to write a response, Sor Juana would be obliged to do so. Either path, to refute the criticism or to respond with silence, according to Sor Juana, is justified by the teachings of the Saints. She explains to Sor Filotea,
Si vos, Señora, gustáredes de que yo haga lo contrario de lo que tenía propuesto a vuestro juicio y sentir, al menor movimiento de vuestro gusto cederá, como es razón, mi dictamen que, como os he dicho era de callar, porque aunque dice San Juan Crisóstomo: *calumniatores convincere oportet, interrogatores docere*, veo que también dice San Gregorio: *victoria non minor est, hostes tolerare, quam hostes vincere*; y que la paciencia vence tolerando y triunfar sufriendo. (Cruz Respuesta 4: 472)

If, lady, you wish that I act contrary to what I have proposed here for your judgement and opinion, the merest indication of your desire will, as is seemly, countermand my inclination, which, as I have told you, is to be silent, for although Saint John Chrysostom says, *those who slander must be refuted, and those who question, taught*, I know also that Saint Gregory says, *It is no less a victory to tolerate enemies than to overcome them*. And that patience conquers by tolerating and triumphs by suffering. (Peden Poems 69)

Sor Juana utilizes the teachings of St. Chrysostom and of St. Gregory to show how either path, refutation or silence, is endorsed by ecclesiastical texts. In this way, Sor Juana presents herself as willing to follow the directions of Sor Filotea only because it does not go against the teachings of the Church Fathers. Sor Juana’s obedience, then, is primarily to the Catholic Church and its dogma and not to earthly powers and social pressures. This provides Sor Juana with some independence from the mundane concerns of propriety. This argument also helps her show how one ecclesiastical teaching can be contradicted by another, both being of equal authority. She does this in the case of the teachings used to justify the ban on women’s education. This statement solidifies Sor Juana’s stance that the *Respuesta* is not a response to criticism, and that Sor Filotea is not being seen as an enemy; it is insinuated through the phrasing that Sor Filotea needs neither to be educated nor to be conquered as a foe.
Reading the Church Fathers on Sex

Outside of the Respuesta, Sor Juana follows the teachings of the Church Fathers to create a proper image of herself. Sor Juana argues that for women, intellectual equality can be achieved through a gender-free nature. This argument is found in many of Sor Juana’s texts. Supported by the works of St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom, this reason is kept coherent throughout Sor Juana’s work. In a poem mentioned in Chapter II, Sor Juana claims that she is not to be seen as a woman, for she does not function in society as a woman. In this poem (Cruz, poem 48, 1: 136), Sor Juana insinuates that her soul is neither male nor female and that her body is irrelevant to her intellectual and religious pursuits. She states,

\[
y \text{ solo se que mi cuerpo,}
\]
\[
sin que a uno u otro se incline,
\]
\[
es neutro, o abstracto, cuanto
\]
\[
solo el Alma deposito.(101-108)
\]

I know only that my body,
not to either state inclined,
is neuter, abstract, guardian
of only what my Soul consigns. (Peden Poems 141)

Her body, not willing to follow either the male or female state, remains unimportant. It is “abstract” in nature, never taking a concrete form, never gaining importance. In this way, Sor Juana separates gender functions from sexual identity. For the nun, to be a woman who must live according to the rules set for women, one must function as a woman (gender). To be born female (sex) does not mean that the individual needs to behave as a woman and abide by the set of social limitations placed on women. Sor Juana seems to be acting under the adage that “women are made, not born.” By stating
that her biological constitution as a female does not mean that she has to behave and live her life as a woman in society, Sor Juana is fighting against the idea that “sex is destiny.” Through a conscious act of disagreement, Sor Juana defines herself as ungendered, despite her sex. Situating her soul as a more important and separate entity from her body, Sor Juana is following the teachings of Jerome and Chrysostom. She is freeing herself from worldly ties and concentrates on earning her salvation through the life of the spirit, the denial of the body and gendered social functions. This argument, of course, is designed to give her the right to claim intellectual freedom.

In the writings of Saint John Chrysostom, cleric of Antioch and bishop of Constantinople in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, there is a clear elevation in status for bodies without physical functions. As Elizabeth Clark points out, “there was within patristic Christianity an elevation of status for celibate women, but not for married ones” (vi). According to Sor Juana, this elevation of the virgin body allows women to participate in what were commonly considered men’s realms. A part of the theology Sor Juana ignored is that these saints upheld the belief that the spirit is not disembodied until the afterlife. Though the spirits of man and woman are equal, as Sor Juana asserts, the saints state that spiritual equality does not mean that men and women should enjoy the same status in life. The fact that the “worldly inequalities” are removed in the spirit, “in no way justifies disturbing the status quo or traditional mores. Not until the afterlife will ‘no male and female’ truly apply. Until that time, sexual politics hold sway” (Clark 14). Sor Juana, however, does not seem too disturbed by this technicality. In her poem, El Sueño, the spirit leaves the body and searches for the
answers that reason and divine knowledge can bring, notwithstanding the gendered body that it has left behind. This body left behind is not referred to until the last line of the poem, when the female gender is assigned to it.

The teachings of Jerome and Chrysostom prompt women to abandon their families, leave all of their terrestrial concerns behind, and devote themselves to their spiritual marriage with Christ. This teaching is exemplified when Sor Juana’s poem states proudly that because of her choice to enter a cloister instead of entering a marriage, she is alone in the world and has no worries outside of the salvation of her soul. The poem (Cruz, poem 49, 1: 143), written for an admirer, is auto-referential and begins by stating that her talent is highly overestimated by the praises that she receives. She then goes on to explain that instead of finding joy in the praise she has earned through her writing, she finds happiness in devoting her life to God, with no hindrances from family. Referring to her single and childless state as a kind of holistic perfection, she states,

Lo que me ha dado más gusto,
es ver que, de aquí adelante,
tengo solamente yo
de ser todo mi linaje. (129-132)

What has pleased me the most, / is to see, that from here on, / I only have myself / as my whole lineage.

Sor Juana, in this text, displays her willingness to accept Chrysostom’s idea that lineage is not only unimportant, but a hindrance in the gaining of salvation. It is in this light that Sor Juana can portray her family-less state as a triumph, as an achievement in which she takes pride.
According to Chrysostom, children were a parting present from God after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. Chrysostom claims that once human beings lost their immortality for the sake of knowledge, children provided another type of immortality. Christ, through his resurrection and promise of eternal life, made the production of children and that form of immortality unnecessary. Chrysostom believed that "children were merely a solace, a compensation for the immortality the first couple had forfeited—and Christians who now have the hope of resurrection should find such solace unnecessary" (Clark 9). Sor Juana echoes this belief as she extols the fact that, as a virgin and bride of Christ, she will end her lineage and find a truer form of immortality. Indeed, Chrysostom, in a chapter entitled "There Were Formerly Two Reasons for Marriage But Now One," states that "only one reason remains for it [marriage]: the suppression of licentiousness and debauchery" (Virginity 27). Children, therefore, through this theology, are completely divested of their importance to humanity.

Sor Juana never mourns the lack of children in her writings. The nun claims that her function as a woman is completely negated because she serves no man as such and, therefore, she is free to pursue her academic and religious interests. In her writings, Sor Juana extols the virtues of wisdom and purity in women; rarely does she mention, much less celebrate, the role of women as mothers and wives. As will be seen in the chapter on the speculum, the role of mother and wife is relevant only when it plays an important role in depicting the virtue of a woman. Chrysostom’s beliefs on the nature of childbearing, as a compensation for immortality which is no longer necessary, “place
woman’s position as childbearer in a somewhat negative light. Her role here is fraught with ambivalence. If her services as allayer of male lust and as producer of children were not part of God’s intention for her at creation, but were merely results of the original sin, her sexual role appears of dubious value” (Clark 9-10). Sor Juana, through the denial of bodily functions, is in no way diminishing the role of women. Discarding the need for a sexual function, she is compliant with the idea that women, through the coming of Christ, are free from the servitude with which they were punished after the expulsion from Eden and so claims herself able to enter in traditionally male-dominated realms.

Sor Juana portrays the lack of family as delightful as she is free from the worldly concerns that would prevent her from reaching her potential in the realm of the spirit. In the same poem (Cruz, poem 49, 1: 143), the nun rebels in her lack of concerns. She states,

¿Hay cosa como saber
que ya dependo de nadie,
que he de morirme y vivirme
cuando a mí se me antojare?
¿Que no soy término ya
de relaciones vulgares,
i ha de cansarme el pariente
ni molestarme el compadre?
¿Que yo soy toda mi especie
y que a nadie he de inclinar me,

7 What is more, Chrysostom goes further by stating that children serve as an excuse for men to try to gain the riches of this earth. To Chrysostom, children tied men and women to earthly concerns, and that, in turn, impoverished the life of the soul. He notes that people, in trying to provide for their children, are asked: “What’s the point of such a frenzy for money? Immediately he makes the child his excuse, and says it is out of regard for him that he does it all. While he offers his child as excuse and thus disclaims any guilt . . .” (Chrysostom Homily 59 Genesis 3 167). Children, then, are not only unnecessary, they are also incitements toward sin.
pues cualquiera debe sólo
amar a su semejante? (133-144)

Is there anything like knowing / that I depend on no one, / and that I am
to live and die / when it suits me? / That I am no longer an object / of
mundane relationships / nor is a kinsman to tire me / nor a compadre to
bother me? / That I am all of my specie / and that I am inclined to no
one, / for one ought to only / love those of one's kind.

Sor Juana shows her willingness and pleasure to be free of all of the relationships that
come from marriage and family. Sor Juana depicts her state alone as independence. She
is free to live and die as she sees fit due to her lack of mundane obligations.

It is important to note that in reality Sor Juana did not shun her family after
entering the convent, as one may be led to think after such statements. She not only
economically aided her family, but also took in to live with her two of her nieces
educating them inside the convent. However, in her writings, it is her claim that she
wants to be left completely alone, free of all earthly concerns and family ties. In her
texts, Sor Juana revels in her independence and in the non-traditional role that she
creates for herself. She dismisses childbearing and the role of women in the family as
things that would sadden her and leave her unsatisfied. This desire for isolation is based
on the teachings of the saints who claimed that women are only distracted from
salvation by their families. Her clear statements, shunning family and regarding them as
they ought to be regarded according to the teachings of the Church Fathers in the face
of her actual behavior toward them, further emphasizes the impersonal nature of her
writings. In this case, as in many others, Sor Juana's interest lies in presenting an image
of herself in her writings that follows the precepts of the Church. The nun shows little
desire to present herself to the public in a personally and psychologically accurate way. Through rhetoric, the nun creates an image of herself that attempts to avoid all potential problems by following theologically dogmatic precepts.

Since, in the eyes of that patristic theology, there is something intrinsically lacking in the physical condition of being a woman, to gain a higher level of spirituality on this earth women need to turn away from their natural functions. In order for a woman to be considered virtuous they need to transform themselves from ‘just women’ into ‘more than women.’ There is, in the writings of St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom, a necessity of turning women away from their traditional roles in order to see them as more than women. According to these saints, a turning away from family ties and all that they signify in order to turn toward God liberated women and brought them to a higher level of existence. These Church Fathers found that it was necessary to de-feminize women in order to see them as spirits; “to relieve women of their roles as wives and mothers was absolutely essential to Jerome’s and Chrysostom’s attempt to turn them into something other than female” (Clark 50). The importance of the earthly family is undermined in the light of eternal grace; the importance of the physical gendered bodies is undermined by the fate of the un-gendered spirit.

In the light of this theology, we see that Sor Juana’s statement in the Respuesta, that she chose to be a nun due to her interest in salvation and “la total negación que tenía al matrimonio” (4: 446) ‘given the total antipathy I felt for marriage’ (Peden Poems 17), needs little gloss. In what has been considered a puzzling dilemma, Sor Juana never explains why she had such a negative attitude toward marriage. Pfandl and
Paz have taken this antipathy as a sign of emotional scarring left by her mother's unmarried state and her father's absence during her childhood years. Though that may be conceivable, it is unsubstantiated. Sor Juana is acquainted with the works of the saints, as was anyone educated at the time, and it is more probable that she may have agreed with this view of women's function in a society as harsh as México's and thus found marriage to be neither an apt choice nor remotely tempting. The fact that she never felt a need to explain herself after such a strong statement shows that the reasoning behind the statement needed little explanation to be understood. This further points to the likelihood that a negative view of marriage, based on theological grounds, abounded at the time.

If Sor Juana held that Chrysostom was correct about women and marriage, there is no way that she could have been thrilled at the prospect of wedlock. Marriage, for the saint, in no way glorified women. As, "for Chrysostom, the man as the head of the family contributes spiritual qualities to the marriage relation whereas woman as the body provides only the material services appropriate to her station, such as the sexual ones which keep her husband from frequenting prostitutes" (Clark 8). For Chrysostom, marriage was a way the weak in moral character could license their sins, and so minimize their faults. However, it is the man who benefits and the woman who serves as a function. He states that "marriage is good because it keeps man chaste and does not allow him to die engulfed by fornication" (Chrysostom Virginity 34). However, this is only a consolation as even the married man who has sex is weak in flesh and corrupted in spirit. It is the abstinent person who deserves praise and respect in the eyes of man.
and God alike. Chrysostom makes this clear by stating that “marriage is no longer useful or necessary but an impediment to virtue, not only because it creates many difficulties, but also because it deprives one of a larger share of praise” (Virginity 35). Clearly, within the confines of this theology, marriage was lesser in virtue than celibacy. Matrimony is even a less attractive choice for women as in marriage women served as a tool for the benefit of the man.

Following this perception of wedlock, the social as well as spiritual servitude that marriage heaped upon a woman made it unlikely that Sor Juana would find the option of marriage an appealing one. It is also noteworthy that a marriage would be unlikely to provide her the freedom to study and write. Indeed, Chrysostom, when referring to the things lost when a woman chose to remain a virgin (the trials and chores of the household, the childbearing, subjectivity to a husband) makes marriage sound so bad that he makes it seem as if “the present advantages of virginity apparently suffice to render it preferable even if there were no afterlife” (Clark 19). If Sor Juana agreed with this point of view, which is what she implies in her writings, it is little wonder she chose to enter a convent.

The advantages of virginity, however, were not limited to the expenditure of time for a woman. Chrysostom listed the entirely physical advantages of virginity. Indeed, Chrysostom states that maintaining virginity, for women, prolongs one’s physical prime:

... the birth pangs, parturition, the bearing and rearing of children, ... cause the bloom of youth to fade. ... But with a virgin, nothing of this sort happens, for there is no intercourse which can restrain and relax the
frenzy of nature, nor do labor pains and child-rearing dry up her flesh; to the contrary, these virgins stay in their prime for a long time, since they remain untouched. (Instruction 166)

While the aesthetic considerations that Chrysostom presents are never touched upon by Sor Juana Inés directly in relationship to virginity, there is a poem which talks of aesthetic considerations of youth. In this poem, the speaker states the desire to die young rather than age due to the loss of beauty that old age brings. In any case, by presenting herself in her texts as agreeing with this dogmatic perception of marriage, she portrays herself as a person who sought virtue through personal sacrifice.

The frigidity of the poem, stating that she does not want any kin since you have to love those of your kind, is defendable through the advice that Jerome gave to women. Jerome did not just encourage women to not enter into marriage, he prompted those already married and with children to either leave or not love too much their existing families. As noted, “we find Jerome consistently denigrating those women who exhibit too much affection for their children or husbands, or who, if childless, yearn for offspring; conversely, he heaps praise upon those who have renounced family ties for the sake of Christ. Some of his advice to women in this regard is positively insensitive to human feeling” (Clark 50). The little importance given to family within this theology did not allow for any type of social equality for women who were married. Any hopes of achieving even spiritual equality required the abnegation of relationships of the flesh, familial or sexual.

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Poem 148 (Cruz 1: 278), a sonnet, with the first line reading “Miro Celia una rosa que en el prado.” The last two lines of the poem read “que es fortuna morirte siendo hermosa / y no ver el ultraje de ser vieja” ‘to die while beautiful is finer far / than to suffer the affront of growing old’ (Peden Poems 173).
The type of sexual equality Chrysostom and Jerome advertised was only attainable through a sacrifice of earthly interests. Women were clearly in a subordinate role due to Eve’s transgression and there were no ways for a woman to claim equality without denying their biological femininity. The teachings did allow certain paths toward equality; for:

there were, however, two ways which Chrysostom acknowledged that Christian women had attained a semblance of equality with men. Martyrdom was the first of the means by which the subjection of women was overturned and parity with males achieved. To the women martyrs could be applied the famous words of Galatians 3:28, “no male and female.” (Clark 15)

This sacrifice of the body proved the androgynty of the spirit. Those women who successfully achieved a sacrifice of their lives for the sake of their beliefs gained the ultimate equality according to Chrysostom: “he goes so far as to call them male. St. Pelagia, for example, who threw herself off a roof rather than face ravishment by soldiers, is described by Chrysostom as a woman in sex but not in spirit” (Clark 15).

Obviously, this was not a path that women would have the liberty to take simply to achieve spiritual equality.

The second way which Chrysostom held that women could gain equality with men is through a denial of their bodies by maintaining their virginity. Chrysostom granted an alternate route since “once the persecutions ceased in the fourth century, martyrdom likewise ended and was replaced with virginity as a means of showing one’s extraordinary devotion to God” (Clark 16). Chastity in a woman transgressed the
limitations usually ascribed to the female condition and so, therefore, showed the determined nature of the devotee and allowed for a higher social status.\footnote{The idea that martyrdom could be replaced by virginity is explored in "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Fathers" (Herbert Musurillo, \textit{Traditio} 12[1956]: 1-64 [special attention to part entitled "The Martyrdom of Asceticism," 55-62]).}

Virgins, should they choose to love God as well as deny themselves the pleasures of their bodies in order to free their spirits from the constraints of the flesh, enter a state where their thoughts are elevated by their bodily purity. Sor Juana seems to follow this vein of thought, giving herself justification for writing by stating that her mind has been equipped to deal with the concepts due to her chaste state. Women raised themselves greatly as

Chrysostom spoke of virginity as a \textit{politeia}, a distinctive state or way of life. . . . In a similar vein, he writes that virgins astound the world by demonstrating that in a female nature there could be present an "angelic politeia." . . . But virginal life for Chrysostom was not only a \textit{politeia}; it was also a \textit{philosophia}. The marvelously elevated condition of virginity is the very embodiment of "philosophy." (Clark 16-17)

Through abstinence, women could leave their flawed biologies behind and gain a more angelic nature for both their bodies and their minds. Of course, Sor Juana never claims an angelic nature as a justification for allowing her to write; it would have been quickly censored as too proud, but this view of virgins was widely known.

In fact, Chrysostom did not stop there as he believed that this angelic nature should be obvious to the naked eye. He holds that,

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
it is necessary, then, that when she [a virgin] makes her regal entrance into the marketplace that she appear as the very image of all philosophy and astound everyone, as if she were an angel just now descended from heaven. If one of the cherubim themselves appeared on earth it would
\end{center}
\end{quote}
attract all men towards itself; so the virgin too ought to throw everyone who sees her into wonder and terror at her holiness. (Chrysostom *Necessity* 237)

It is Chrysostom’s argument that the purity of the soul, as allowed by the chastity of the body, manifests itself physically. What Chrysostom did with these statements is allow the possibility for women to be *good* despite the Fall. Not all patristic theology allowed for this. With Chrysostom’s belief that women, through their behavior, could reach an angelic stature, Sor Juana could then claim, due to her life choices, at least intellectual equality with men.

Even the elevated status of virgins, however, could not fully liberate women from the status quo. Though Chrysostom believed virgins to be extraordinarily better than the rest of womanhood, he did not believe that anything could possibly give women total equality with men. Women, due to their faulty natures, could not be treated as equals in mundane matters. It is stated that, “in the worldly order, he believed a woman should not hope to equal a man or assume functions traditionally considered masculine, but in the spiritual order she can and does. The virgins and widows to and about whom Chrysostom wrote are praised for their ‘manly spirit’ (*andreia*), for ‘playing the man’ (*andrizo*)” (Clark 19). All of the spiritual equality that he believed could be achieved never challenged the order of the world.

Despite the fact that Chrysostom believed that women could reach a state of angelic nature, he never relented in his belief that their social position was, rightfully, inferior to man’s. He states that the woman who brings man under her rule is an aberration of nature and that no woman should attempt to do that for the sake of her
own soul. However, he held that a woman’s place is to have respect for man, not necessarily to serve him. He states clearly that “it is not the woman who brings men under her rule who is esteemed and considered remarkable by everyone, but the woman who respects them” (Chrysostom *Necessity* 231). Chrysostom, therefore, does not, in any way, set the ground for social equality. He does, however, set the ground for the type of limited freedom that Sor Juana is able to achieve: freedom from any specific man and a kind of intellectual and spiritual equality through physical sacrifice.

Further confining the space where women could be equal at least in spirit, though definitely not in body, Chrysostom goes on to say that the way that women can gain respectability is to be independent from men and dependent on Jesus. To attain the status of a virgin, according to both Jerome and Chrysostom, it was not fully necessary to be technically a virgin, as widows could attain that level should they renounce all worldly ties and physical pleasures. To be a virgin, as they spoke of the term, it was necessary to live your life in devotion to God. Women who were virgins in their physical state but did not live in devotion to God were not pure. Of those women, he states “even if her body should remain inviolate the better part of her soul has been ruined: her thoughts. What advantage is there in the walls having stood firm when the temple has been destroyed?” (Chrysostom *Virginity* 8). The status of virgin, according to Chrysostom, had to be accompanied by a devotion to God in order to carry with it a type of fame that all should desire. He states: “if you wish to be admired among men, have no familiarity with them; keep far away from their company, their sight, and cohabitation with them. Then women will be astonished at you and all men likewise
will be amazed, seeing that you are a virgin who sits undistractedly beside your Bridegroom” (Chrysostom Necessity 232).\(^{10}\) The devotion to Christ, in this view, removes women’s obligations toward men and the mundane. This, in the age of Sor Juana and with practical concerns in mind, necessarily means entrance into a convent.

It is valuable to note that Sor Juana, through her life choices and in her texts, shows herself to be in line with dogmatic thought. Through her own statements, she became a nun because she was in agreement with tradition, not became aligned with tradition because she was a nun. Though she never stated that a religious life may be a calling, she did clearly state that there was a calling away from married life and toward a religious ideal. The only way that Sor Juana may have seen it possible to escape the evils of her gender was to be celibate and in the service of God.\(^{11}\) Chrysostom, ever the optimist about marriage, held that:

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\text{it is not possible for a woman about to live with a man not to fearfully calculate all the misfortunes associated with a shared life. The virgin, on the other hand, has been freed of marital troubles and suspicion of them as well. . . . Marital problems are just like the thorns that stick to your clothes when you climb across a hedge. When you turn to pick one out, you are caught by several more. . . . In a word, it is impossible to discover a marriage free from all unpleasantness. (Virginity 87)}
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Even though Chrysostom believed that the married state was not good for either men or women, given women’s lower social standing, he believed it to be a harsher fate for

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\(^{10}\) This placement of virginity as much more beneficial and virtuous then marriage is never questioned in Chrysostom’s writing. In On Virginity, St. Chrysostom has a chapter entitled “It Is Easier to Obtain the Kingdom of Heaven Through Virginity than Through Marriage” (67).

\(^{11}\) Virginity was a way in which women, while attaining a higher level of virtue, could free themselves from the harsh fate that was marriage. It is stated that “a woman’s escape from the bondage of marriage could be made by the profession of celibacy. The virgin, raised above the curse of Genesis 3: 16, was relieved of the burdens of childbearing and subjection to a husband” (Clark 18).
women as they placed themselves in a subservient position. In all Sor Juana's negative statements about marriage and the role of women next to men, she never states anything rebellious or harsh in comparison to the teachings of the Saint Jerome and Saint Chrysostom.

It is also beneficial to remember that Sor Juana, in following the Scholastic tradition, was also following a common literary tradition of the time. The Baroque Spanish literary environment of the Golden Age was always and in all ways dogmatically Catholic. The works of the greats of the era, like Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo, were all following the Scholastic strain of theology in their works. It is vital to underscore that Sor Juana was not in any way original in the use of ecclesiastical texts for her own writing; this is not a technique that she turned to due solely to her status as a nun. It is conducive to an understanding of Sor Juana's place in the literary atmosphere of the time to see her as following both the Scholastic Tradition and the reigning profane literary traditions.

Some critics, however, do not take both of these traditions into consideration when studying her works. Constance Montross, for example, ignoring the poem Soledad, by Góngora, as a model for Sor Juana's El Sueño, points to a passage of St. Thomas Aquinas as the source for the framework for the poem (40). Montross identifies this passage as a plan Sor Juana follows throughout the poem to arrive at the same conclusions that Aquinas does (53). Throughout the poem, Montross states, Sor Juana's treatment of themes, such as knowledge, the sun, the night, colors, and adornment on women, keep her within the Thomistic tradition (82). Though this is incontestable, it
aids in any interpretation of this poem to note that Gónora did the same things in his poem. It is sure that Sor Juana was familiar with St. Thomas Aquinas’ works, and that she did have in mind the necessity of keeping herself in line with his precepts. However, it is limiting to see her works as following a uni-linear tradition. In order to study Sor Juana’s texts without minimizing her literary achievements, it is necessary to consider that not only was Sor Juana following an existing secular tradition and an existing theological tradition, but that she was possibly also adding many twists and challenges of her own.

Sor Juana is not limited to following traditions; she, within the confines of these traditions, simultaneously challenges them. Though none of these traditions ever say, clearly, that all participants need to be male, the fact that Sor Juana, not only female but also not aristocratic, was able to fully participate did indeed challenge many of the notions involved with literature and with the literary traditions. Her ability to comprehend and manipulate philosophic and theological texts contradicted many of the beliefs that were espoused at the time. Sor Juana challenged the Scholastic Tradition not through her writings, but instead, by writing. In her Respuesta, there are signs of her challenge to the exclusion of women from the world of philosophy and theology. She states that “si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito. Y prosiguiendo en mi modo de cogitaciones, digo que esto es tan continuo en mí, que no necesito de libros; y en una ocasión que, por un grave accidente de estómago, me prohibieron los médicos el estudio, pasé así algunos días” (Cruz Respuesta 4:460) ‘had Aristotle prepared victuals, he would have written more. And pursuing the manner of my
cogitations I tell you that this process is so continuous in me that I have no need for books. And on one occasion, when because of a grave upset of the stomach the physicians forbade me to study, I passed thus some days’ (Peden Poems 43). With this statement, Sor Juana cautiously points to the fact that the thoughts which are so highly prized in the realm of men, the thoughts found in books, could have been bettered if only the authors had some knowledge of the realm of women. With no small satisfaction, she points to the fact that the lack of books does not equal the lack of thought. Sor Juana points to the wisdom found in women’s traditional roles and, in so doing, questions the idea that knowledge is something that belongs to men.

Sor Juana ardently argues against the notion that women cannot participate in the literary world. Through the use of the Scholastic Tradition, the nun endeavors to give this argument a place in the Church Canon. In order to do so, to situate the right to write for women, Sor Juana has to differentiate between sex and gender. The females of the species, according to Sor Juana, are equal in spirit to the males. It is their role on this earth that lowers their status. By rejecting the roles of women in society, by rejecting their social and sexual functions, women can participate in the realms that are usually reserved for men. As a nun, rejecting her role as mother and wife, Sor Juana is free to write, according to her own logic and the texts of the Church Fathers. This argument, clearly put forth in the Respuesta, is also found in many of her other texts. Sor Juana provides a coherent argument for the participation of women in the literary world. The nun never argues against the beliefs that women should be limited in their
social endeavors. What the nun argues that when a woman sacrifices her social functions, she leaves behind the limitations set on women in general.
Chapter 5. Hagia Sophia: The Feminine Face of Wisdom and Virtue

Of the Biblical figures that Sor Juana utilizes, the one that she relied upon for the reconfiguration of the figure of women is that of the Virgin Mary. Sor Juana participated in the existing Marian devotional tradition by writing many poems about and dedicated to Mary. However, in her poems praising the Virgin Mary, Sor Juana deviates from the tradition of Marian devotional writing by depicting Mary as the mother of wisdom and the intermediary of knowledge between man and God. She also portrays Mary as a forceful agent in the spiritual realm. In this depiction of Mary, a woman, as the intellectual connection between God and humanity, as the harbinger of divine inspiration and true knowledge, Sor Juana makes a place for women in the intellectual landscape. Through the image of Mary as wise and virtuous, the nun counters the image of women as descendants of Eve and the cause of the fall.

Sor Juana creates a portrait of Mary that depicts the Mother of God as the utmost in intellect. This portrayal of Mary serves to further enhance the idea that a woman can be naturally intellectual. Sor Juana presents Mary, the most virtuous of women, as the most knowledgeable of mortals. She further enhances Mary’s virtue by arguing that Mary was born without original sin (a dogma in contention during that time). The nun, through her praise of the Mother of God, depicted her knowledge as one of the many virtues that made Mary holy. Mary’s wisdom, however, was not only a virtue; it also served a heavenly purpose, for she was attributed with having taught the angels all they knew. Sor Juana presents a clear case according to which the knowledge of a woman (albeit the Mother of God) served creation in an indispensable manner. By
placing a feminine face on wisdom, Sor Juana combats those who would claim that women are incapable of learning and maintaining their virtue. By making Mary an active figure in her texts, the nun moves the realm of feminine virtue away from the meek and passive and toward the brave and active. Sor Juana’s Mary, still the Mary of the Church, is a dynamic and forceful figure whom women ought to emulate. Sor Juana, however, would have women emulating an active, knowledgeable, virtuous force and not a meek and silent woman. Following this pattern of good behavior for women, Sor Juana’s active participation in literary discourse is not a deviation from the prescribed behavior for women.

The Virgin Mary within the Catholic Church has been seen as the representative of human virtue, chastity, and humility. As a critic notes: “St Jerome’s pithy saying, ‘Death through Eve, life through Mary,’ also conveys how crucial was Mary’s compliant virginity in the complex story of the Incarnation and man’s salvation” (Spear 130-1). Mary becomes the redeemer of Eve and, therefore, of women. Sor Juana’s depiction of Mary as an educated woman, therefore, questions the conventional idea of sancta simplicitas, that women needed to be ignorant in order to remain virtuous. Sor Juana begins some of her Marian poems, written at the request of the Catholic Church for Ascension mass, by calling Mary “la soberana Doctora” or “la maestra divina,” clearly depicting Mary as a teacher and intellectual. Through the figure of the Virgin Mary as a scholar and teacher, Sor Juana invokes the tradition of Hagia Sophia.

Sor Juana’s use of the Virgin Mary as a redeemer of womankind after the fall from Grace made possible by Eve, is, in a less generous form, found in Chrysostom. He
counters the argument of women having an inherent flaw in their nature that makes them dependent upon men for guidance and judgment; Chrysostom argues that women were placed under men's command due to Eve's transgression. As a modern critic summarizes, in his treatment of women's subjection to men, the question arises: "Did God create Eve inferior to Adam (male dominance would then be 'by nature') or was Eve's subjection her penalty for luring Adam into sin? Sometimes Chrysostom chose the second alternative: if Eve had not fallen, she and her female descendants would not have been enslaved to the male" (Clark 3). Chrysostom found this to be a necessary part of his theology as he held that all human beings are personally responsible for their sins: that a flawed nature could not be the reason a person commits sin. With this as an assumption, reasons a modern scholar, "one might infer, if women are in a state of subjection to men, their unfortunate position must be viewed as the penalty for misdeeds; they doubtless deserved the punitive measures directed against them" (Clark 4). Eve's sin is great enough to serve as reason to punish women forever more. However, this does not mean that women have a flawed nature that cannot restrain itself from sin. The punishment brought on by Eve comes in the form of familial obligations. The nature of woman, as imperfect as the nature of man, is limited only through social conventions. Following this line of thought, Sor Juana implies that Mary was pure and virtuous enough to be chosen to serve as the mother of God and,

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1 There is an ambivalence in Chrysostom over whether it was sin or nature that made women subservient to men according to God's wishes. For more information, see "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" (in Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, Rosemary Radford Ruether; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).
therefore, compensated for the misdeed of Eve, freeing women from the constraints of servitude.

In Sor Juana's poetry, Mother Mary, through her purity, redeemed women from original sin in the same way that Jesus redeemed mankind. She finds added support for this argument in St. Augustine, when he states that, "We ill used our immortality, so that we deserved to die; Christ used His mortality well to restore us. Our malady arose through the corrupted spirit of woman; from the incorrupted flesh of a woman proceeded our salvation" (15). This view of women, as the instrument of both the fall and the redemption of mankind, allowed Sor Juana to argue that women, like men, were not by nature inferior and were capable of both good and evil.

The Perfection of Mary

Sor Juana argues that Mary is without original sin, herself a product of an Immaculate Conception. God, out of respect for his mother, bestowed upon her a faultless existence. Mary, therefore, has a sinless nature because that is a necessary
thing for her to be worthy to be the Mother of God. As Spear reports, within the Catholic Church none ever argued against the idea that Mary was free from Original Sin. "The question instead was, when had Mary become exempt from Original Sin," (131) states Spear. This was an issue widely discussed at the time that Sor Juana wrote. She participated in this discussion through her poetry unequivocally stating that Mary was a product of an Immaculate Conception, faultless in her whole existence. The discussion as to when the Virgin Mary was forgiven the sin of humanity, whether it be conception, animation, or birth, as Spear continues to explain, was not over until a Papal decree agreed with Sor Juana’s view. “The dispute seemed destined to drag on forever,” states Spear, “particularly with the Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits taking sides, until Pius IX in 1854 settled the matter by proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, that the Blessed Virgin Mary ‘at the first instant of her Conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the omnipotent God ... was preserved free from all stain of original sin’” (131). In the end, for the faithful yet doubtful, the Immaculate Conception of Mary is authenticated by Mary herself during the apparition of the Virgin at Lourdes in 1858. Bernadette Soubirous, a witness to the apparition, relates that,

When Bernadette asked her ‘Lady’ who she was, the apparition replied ‘Que soy era Immaculada Concepció.’ Bernadette, a simple shepherdess, could not know the theological implication of this reply: ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’ This doctrine defines that Mary, alone of all women, was conceived without original sin – it was necessary to define this doctrine because of the dualism of Augustine’s concept of original sin which would necessarily make Mary the transmitter of the sin of the Fall to her son. (Matthews 316)
The purity necessary in Mary, as the Mother of God, is never debated in the Catholic Church. However, the argument as to when Mary becomes sinless in nature was one that reached resolution through the apparition of the Virgin herself. Sor Juana, despite the fact that the issue had not yet been resolved in the Catholic Church, portrays the Virgin Mary as having an Immaculate Conception and to exist alone of all human beings in an exalted realm of purity and divinity. It is through her devotional poetry, to be publicly read at masses, that Sor Juana participates in the existing discourse of the day. The nun took an interest in adding her voice to a heavily debated subject. The stance that she took, though eventually the accepted one, was not without critics at the time. In this particular case, Sor Juana’s portrayal of the Virgin Mary makes her an active participant in the religious debate of the day.

Mary’s sinless nature becomes the basis for Sor Juana’s elevation of the Virgin in her texts as it is her pure nature that allows the redemption of women. Juana Inés clearly denotes Mary’s purity and elevates her importance in the lines written for the feast of the Conception of 1689, where she state:

Mas preservando a María
de los comunes horrores,  
Dios en Ella restituye  
al Orbe sus perfecciones.  
El todo del Universo, 
quê fue imperfecto hasta entonces,  
por su último complemento  
su Pureza reconoce (poem 276, 2: 100, 9-16)

By sheltering Mary / from the common horrors / God restores through her / the perfections of the Orb. / The whole of the Universe, / that was imperfect until then, / by that last complement [addition] / realizes its Purity.
Sor Juana asserts that the elevation of Mary, always through the grace of God, is due to her perfected nature. But what is more, as it is stated in the preceding lines of her poetry, everything is obliged to Mary because her sinless nature allows mankind to be redeemed and all of creation to be perfected. The whole of the universe, though also made by God, was incomplete in its perfection. The making of Mary, the addition of Mary to the universe, culminates the creation, leaving the universe perfect.

The indebtedness of all to Mary, in the face of the grace that God bestowed upon her, elevates Mary to an ennobled position in the religious hierarchy. Sor Juana does not limit the gratitude toward Mary to the universe of men, as seen above. The nun presents all of Heaven and its heavenly inhabitants as also needing the Virgin Mary. An estribillo written for the Mass of the Conception in 1689, clearly indicates the indebtedness of all to Mary. In this poem, where, as previously seen, Sor Juana writes the manner of a dramatic script with numbers denoting different voices, the speakers declare:

Pues ya que toda criatura
quedó deudora a María
de perfección y alegría,
del ornato y hermosura,
canten su Concepción pura,
pues la perfección encierra
1.—del Hombre,
2.—del Ángel,
3.—del Cielo
4.—y la Tierra. (poem 276, 2: 100-1, 17-26)

Well now that all creatures / are in debt to Mary / for perfection and happiness, / for adornments and beauty, / [they should] sing of her pure Conception, / because that perfection encompasses that / 1.—of Man, / 2.—of Angel, / 3.—of Heaven / 4.—and of Earth.
It is through the perfection of Mary that all things in creation can have any beauty. Sor Juana argues that “God restored perfection to the universe by preserving Mary from sin. Her pure conception includes the perfection ‘of man, of angel, of Heaven, and of Earth’” (Tavard 71). In order to perfect the universe, Mary had to be born of an Immaculate Conception as it is her perfection which enables the perfection of the whole. Clearly, Sor Juana is situating Mary as a higher being than all of the angels and the saints. The Mother of God, in this respect, is second only to the trinity. But unlike all of the other ecclesiastical beings, it is through the Mother of God that all of creation becomes pure and beautiful. Jesus may be the force behind the redemption of mankind, but it is out of love for his mother that he endows upon the Earth an original beauty.

In Sor Juana’s poetry, God’s love for Mary is a defining force in the Incarnation. The presence of Mary, therefore, becomes necessary for the presence and function of the Messiah. In the texts of Sor Juana, the redemption of humanity through the coming of Christ is in large part made possible by God’s love for Mary. Sor Juana’s stance is made clear in a poem written on the theme of the Incarnation. She writes:

Aunque de haber Encamado
pudo ser doble el motivo:
de todos, por compasivo;
de Ella, por enamorado.

Y así el bajar este día
al suelo, por varios modos,
fué por la culpa de todos
y la gracia de Maria. (Cruz, poem 358, 2: 222, 33-40)

While to have Incarnated / could have been by a double motive: / for all, because of compassion; / for Her, because of love. / And this day, the
coming / to earth, by various means, / was due to the sin of all / and the grace of Mary.⁴

Sor Juana creates a scenario in which God is prompted to redeem mankind as much for His compassion toward mankind, in general, as He is by his love for Mary, in specific. Sor Juana “is willing to join together two motives of the incarnation: the redemption of humanity and God’s unique love for Mary of Nazareth” (Tavard 135) making Mary’s individual person an integral part in the redemption. This implies that it was important to God, through Jesus, to prize Mary for her individual virtue and not just to use her as a tool in the redemption of humanity as a whole. With this line of reasoning, Sor Juana elevates greatly the importance of Mary as an individual by generating the idea that it was Mary herself, with the grace of God, who earned redemption for humanity. In the same way that the fall of man was brought about through the deception and the action of Eve, then, the redemption of man is due only to the perfection and the virtue of Mary. This perception of Mary made the Virgin much more than a tool or a passive element of God’s designs.⁵

The model of the Virgin Mary that Sor Juana presents is one that transgresses many of the boundaries of propriety for women. Mary, as depicted by the poet, exists in

⁴ Tavard, in his analysis of this poem, translates: “God was ‘compassionate with all, / and enamored of Her.’ The incarnation was due to ‘the sin of all / and the grace of Mary’” (Tavard 135).

⁵ The role of Mary in traditional theology was not defined by the actions of the Mother of God. The conventional view was decidedly one that treated Mary as a passive object. As a critic states: “debates of legendary nicety focused on whether Mary was physically virgin ante partum, in partu, and post partum, that is virgin before, during and after Jesus’ birth; on her physical relations with her husband, Joseph; and on precisely when Mary herself was exempted from Original Sin. These were issues of essential importance because they established the nature of the mother—of the womb—through which the Word was made flesh. Arguments on virginity, menstruation, conception and parturition are so inseparable from the history of Marian theology that it is accurate to say that Mary’s place in Christianity has been defined foremost by her sexual biological functions” (Spear 131).
realms that are usually reserved for men. As one critic notes, “despite her role as intermediary, in most male portrayals Mary verges on passivity; in Sor Juana’s she is startlingly dynamic” (Arenal Tongue 96). In one poem celebrating the Ascension (1676), Mary is depicted as a warrior, going out to fight against the inequities of this world. Sor Juana writes,

¡Allá va, fuera, que sale
la Valiente de aventuras,
Deshacedora de tuertos,
Destrozadora de injurias!
   Lleva de rayos del Sol
resplandeciente armadura,
de las Estrellas el yelmo,
los botines de la Luna;
   Y en un escudo luciente
con que al Infierno deslumbras,
un monte con letras de oro
en que dice: *Tota Pulchra.* (poem 222, 2: 10-11, 8-19)

There she goes, sallying forth, / the Knight Errant, / Un-doer of wrongs, / Destroyer of injustices! / She carries rays of the Sun / for a radiant armor, / of Stars her helmet, / her boots are of the Moon; / And on her shining shield / with which she blinds Hell, / letters of gold are mounted / that say: Totally Beautiful.

This image of Mary, as a warrior in the eternal battle between good and evil, is designed to portray the celestial role of Mary as an active agent in the enforcement of the will of God. The Mother of God, no longer delegated to the demureness of the background, is on the front lines of agency. This poem is “a song of thugs, ruffians, picaros, and wandering soldiers. Mary is ‘la valiente de aventuras,’ a female ‘knight-

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6 There are other poems that also depict Mary as fighting, physically, against evil. In poems 138 and 139 (Cruz 1: 267-270), Mary is depicted as fighting against a Dragon. Mary’s effectiveness on the battleground is testified to by the dragon who, “añade, al llegar a ver, / a la pena de caer / la vergüenza del huir” (Cruz, poem 138, 1: 268, 16-18) ‘at seeing you, [he] adds / to the pain of falling / the shame of fleeing.’
errant" (Kirk 73) where the Mother of God is a decisive force. Mary, however, never relinquishes being "totally beautiful" even when she is a warrior; women's beauty, if it is to be defined by Mary Mother of God, also includes the strength to make men's realm women's.

Sor Juana continues her depiction of Mary, "la Valiente," in her battle against the evils of this world. In this poem, Mary is the active agent who is responsible for the liberation of human beings from the servitude that befell upon them when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. She writes of Mary that it was she:

La que deshizo el encanto
de aquella Serpiente astuta,
que con un conjuro a todos
nos puso servil coyunda; . . . (28-31)
La de quien tiembla el Infierno
si su nombre se pronuncia (Cruz, poem 222, 2: 11,40-41)

Who undid the spell / of that clever Serpent, / that with an incantation /
had put all into servile subjection / . . . Of whom Hell trembles, / if her name is pronounced

With these lines, Sor Juana creates an image of Mary as not just an active religious figure, but also as capable of undoing the bewitchment of the devil. This view of Mary, as a knight actively and physically fighting against the forces of evil with such efficacy that Hell trembles at the mention of her name, is "reminiscent of St. George killing the dragon. Sor Juana shows Mary, the knight, breaking the spell of the cunning serpent. She rights the injustices done to the poor and liberates humanity, prisoners of original sin. All Hell trembles at the mention of her name" (Kirk 73). Sor Juana, by presenting Mary as the one who undoes the enchantment the Serpent places on mankind and
liberating humans of original sin, clearly exhibits Mary as the anti-Eve: the woman whose actions undo and negate the actions of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Sor Juana not only exalted Mary in importance by focusing on her purity and her active agency; she also exalted Mary by showing her as a second Adam. Adam is seen as having been devoid of original sin and, unlike Eve, as an innocent participant in the Fall. By portraying Mary as having the same purity as Adam, and by stating that Mary was a daughter of Adam and not of Eve, Sor Juana distances Mary from the traditional belief that the female nature was flawed.

In a poem written for the celebrations of Conception of 1689, Sor Juana writes:

Quien la hizo Virgen y Madre,
¡pues no es mayor maravilla!  
Hija de Adán y sin mancha,  
Ser la Reina comprendida. (poem 278, 2: 103, 17-24)

7 Apparently, the depiction of Mary as the daughter of Adam and not of Eve, as Sor Juana rendered her, was not the usual way women wrote of Mary. Speaking of the state of modern feminist theology, it is stated that “Elisabeth Gössmann has criticized feminist theology for too one-sidedly focusing on hegemonic kyriarchal mariology and not paying sufficient attention to the long tradition of women’s theological reflection on Mary and the religious veneration of her. Gössmann’s work has documented that women have articulated an understanding different from that of malestream mariology and have developed a very positive image of Mary through the centuries. For instance, whereas malestream mariology has underscored the opposition between Mary and Eve, women’s mariological reflections have sought to establish a relation between both representations by seeing Mary as Eve’s daughter” (Fiorenza 166). See “Reflexionen zur mariologischen Dogmengeschichte” (in Röckelein, Optiz, and Bauer, Maria, Abbild oder Vorbild, 19-36) and Elisabeth Gössmann (“Mariologische Entwicklungen im Mittelalter: Frauenfreundliche und frauenfeindliche Aspekte,” in E. Gössmann and D. R. Bauer, eds., Maria für alle Frauen oder über allen Frauen?, Freiburg: Herder, 1989; 63-85). Though Sor Juana does not clearly place Mary and Eve in direct opposition, despite her statements clarifying that Mary undid Eve’s deed, she does not associate them. In this way, Sor Juana shows an acceptance of misogynist ideology that sees women as the originator of sin. By not defending Eve and her place in this world and human history, Sor Juana accepts the traditional theology and limits her attempt to modifying the perception of women through the use of Mary.

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Who made her Virgin and Mother, / why would [He] not also make her / Daughter of Adam and without sin, / would that not be a bigger marvel? / That in Adam we all sinned, / it is true; but it could not be / that in the law of the slaves / the Queen would be included.

Sor Juana depicts Mary as a queen, rising over the rest of humanity. The slaves, humanity after the Fall, have now a queen who, through her purity, is not chained to the slavery of original sin as everyone else is. Clearly, Sor Juana is striving to make a clear connection between Adam and Mary, simultaneously raising Mary above human levels. The absence of Eve in this discussion, even when stating that we all sinned in Adam, is representative of Sor Juana’s attempt to fully situate the Virgin Mary in men’s realm.

Kirk states that Sor Juana attempts to evade associations between Mary and Eve through the avoidance of the term Ave (which was traditionally attached to Mary) due to the similarity of Ave to Eva, the Spanish of Eve (70). However, there are some very telling poems which have both of the terms, Eva and Ave, which further demonstrates Sor Juana’s desire to portray the Virgin Mary as nullifying Eve’s sin. In a poem written as a derivation of a poem by Gongóra, Sor Juana writes of a Mary who is battling against a Dragon in the name of God. In this poem, she states that Mary, at seeing the Dragon defeated,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a Dios el honor aplica; } \\
y \text{ cuando, de dones rica, } \\
apocando sus riquezas, \\
disminuye sus grandezas, \\
sus bellezas multiplica.
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{Ave es, que con vuelo grave, } \\
de lo injusto haciendo justo, \\
\text{pudo hacer a Adán Augusto, } \\
\text{convirtiendo el Eva a Ave. (Cruz, poem 139, 1: 269, 16-24)}
\]

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to God gives the honor; / and when, rich in gifts / she belittles her riches, 
/ minimizing her greatness, / she multiplies her beauty. / Ave [bird] she 
is, when with a grave flight, / making just out of the unjust, / she could 
make Adam Majestic, / converting the Eve to Ave.

The nun writes that the triumph of Mary mocks the devil (Dragon) and makes "Adán 
Augusto." With these actions, defeating evil and recuperating the loss of Adam in the 
Garden of Eden, Mary turns the Eve into Ave. Eve, the creator of the original sin, is 
turned into the Ave that adorns the title of most pure Mother of God. Eve, who led 
Adam into sin, is denied by Ave Maria who places a crown upon Adam's head, raising 
him into royalty.

Sor Juana, however, does not rest at creating a realm where the purity of Mary 
annuls the sins of Eve. Following the theme of conversion, from Eve to Ave, Sor Juana 
writes a poem in which she addresses a nun's vocation, assumed to be her own. In a 
poem (Cruz, poem 60, 1: 171), which is her own Spanish translation of a poem that Sor 
Juana wrote originally in Latin, the nun writes:

Yo, Esclava del Trino Dios,  
todo el nombre de la Madre  
mudo, y todo para mi  
el EVA se vuelve en AVE. (5-8)  
... y que de Esclava,  
Madre del mismo Dios me llame. (19-20)

I, Slave of the Threefold God, / the name of the Mother / I relinquish, 
and for me / the EVE becomes AVE. / . . . and Slave, / let the Mother of 
God himself call me.

Though she does not relate Eve and Mary, she does make it clear that for herself she is 
leaving behind the things that relate her to Eve, as in her earthly mother, and is adopting 
the things that would make her Mary's slave. In this poem, it becomes clear that she
does more than disassociate Mary from Eve, she also detaches herself from Eve and her sin. By affiliating herself with Mary, she aligns herself with the domains that she has aligned with Mary such as the domains of knowledge and virtue. Sor Juana aligns herself with the active and courageous Virgin Mary that she has created, taking herself away from the sinful Eve, mother of all humanity.

If Mary is the second Adam, it is implied that the female and the male of the species have the same capacity for sanctity. As Tavard notes, Sor Juana equates Mary's position to that of Adam's with such clarity that she states Mary to be "the most true Phoenix," risen from Adam's ashes" (93). Tavard then quotes Sor Juana stating that the nun so elevates Mary's position in theology that she declares that: "... no descansó Dios de favorecer a su escogida y carisima Madre; antes, añadiendo favores a favores y grandezas a grandezas, quiso que se conociera que no se estrechaban los privilegios de María sólo al ejemplar de los de Adán en Paraíso . . ." (Ejercicios de la Encarnación 4: 494) "... God did not rest from favoring his chosen and most dear Mother; rather, adding favors upon favors and greatness upon greatness, He wanted it to be known that the privileges of Mary were not limited only to the model of those of Adam in Paradise." This statement, if nothing else, seems to equalize the status of man and woman, with Mary being equal if not surpassing in grace to Adam.

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Tavard finds this of questionable theological worth. He states as a suspicion that Sor Juana has the intention of portraying Mary as having power equal to her son.9

Tavard quickly dismisses these apprehensions, however, as he clarifies that Sor Juana was following a preexisting tradition. He states:

Has Sor Juana so exalted Mary that Christ has been replaced by his mother, that Mary has become a substitute for the redeemer, that she has even been made divine? Juana’s language is not so much a matter of theology as of style, a triumphalistic style in the baroque manner that was favored for reasons of taste and of theology in the Counterreformation, especially in Hispanic lands. Given the bent of her vivid imagination, Juana Inés carried this style to its farthest limits. But in all that she wrote on the Virgin Mary, she intended to describe the glorious works of God. (Tavard 93-94).

Tavard makes it clear that Sor Juana was following a literary style and not dissenting from Catholic beliefs. It is interesting to note that a modern critic would see it necessary to clear the nun from the possible accusation of heresy without ever noting that it was not to Jesus that Sor Juana equated Mary; Sor Juana equated Mary to Adam.10 Though Sor Juana does have poems in which the power of the Virgin Mary is highly elevated and where Jesus is seen as interdependent with Mary,11 Sor Juana never

9 In line with this critique, in the previous poem, the translation that Tavard provides does limit the privileges of Mary to be equal to those of Adam. Tavard provides the following: “God did not weary of favoring his chosen and most dear Mother, adding favors upon favors and greatnesses upon greatnesses; rather . . . not only did Mary’s privileges equal the model of Adam in Paradise” (Tavard 93).

10 It is also of interest to see how the perceived semi-heresy is attributed to a “vivid imagination.”

11 In one poem in particular, Sor Juana did portray Christ and Mary as interdependent. In this poem (poem 53, 1: 163), Sor Juana “drew on the legendary assumption that bees are born of roses. Christ is the honeybee, and Mary, the ‘fragrant Rose.’ This rose gives birth only to this honeybee . . . so interdependent are ‘Son and Daughter’ that while neither owes anything, each is obligated to the other. They stand in a relationship of mutual correspondence” (Tavard 104). Sor Juana states: “Hijo y Madre, en tan divinas / peregrinas competencias / ninguno queda deudor / y ambos obligados quedan” (33-36) ‘Son and Mother, in such divine / pilgrimages compete, / neither stays in debt / and both stay obligated.’ Once again, the importance of Mary as an individual is elevated.
represented Mary as having power of her own: it all came directly from God through grace. That Sor Juana presents an image of Mary that is superior, and not just equal, to that of Adam is not heresy, it is just challenging. This can be established through the silence of the Holy Roman Inquisition.

This image of Mary, as the second Adam, is further support for Sor Juana’s claim that Mary is the most perfect of humans. Mary, as the only human parent of Christ, is by definition the most holy a human can be. In Sor Juana’s theology, the level of similarity between Mary and God was the most a human being could hope to attain. Because Mary is the Mother of God, and because she is the recipient of God’s love and grace, she can attain a likeness that is otherwise impossible for humans. In a poem written in praise of Saint Bernard, Sor Juana clearly states that Mary is the intermediary in the standards of holiness. She writes:

Cristo en propiedad merece  
del Lilio la candidez;  
Maria no es Dios, pero es  
 quien más a Dios se parece;  
y Bernardo tanto crece,  
 que a los Dos se ha parecido:  
 ¡Cristo es Lilio, y María  
 es como Lilio! (Cruz, poem 349 Coplas, 2: 211, 5-12)

Y con un orden gallardo,  
graduando la mayoría,  
se parece a Dios María,  
y a María, el gran Bernardo.  
 Pues ¿por qué en unirlos tardo,  
cuando entre sí se han unido?  
 ¡Cristo es Lilio, y María  
 es como Lilio! (Cruz, poem 349 Coplas 2: 212, 29-36)

Christ in likeness deserves / the Lily in whiteness; / Mary is not God, but is / who most resembles God; / and Bernard grows so much, / that he
resembles Both: / Christ is the Lily, and Mary / is like the Lily! / . . . /
And with an elegant order, / graduating the greatness, / Mary resembles
God, / and to Mary, the great Bernard. / Well, why do I tarry in joining
them / when they have joined themselves already? / Christ is the Lily,
and Mary / is like the Lily!

In this view, Christ is incontestably the Lily, the symbol that has been given to him throughout tradition. Sor Juana makes it clear, in this poem, that she is not stating that Mary is equal to Christ in symbol. She is stating, quite clearly, that the culmination of human perfection lies in the woman Mary, though not a lily, by stating that Mary is like a Lily. It is Mary’s resemblance to Christ, to God, that ennobles her. St. Bernard, in his saintly behavior, does not come to resemble God himself, but instead, resembles Mary. Like Plato’s divided line, the thing that mankind can most approximate in goodness and virtue is Mary. God, above the divided line, cannot be reached or even emulated. Mary’s God-Like persona becomes the measure of man, both male and female. Sor Juana utilizes this idea to declare that Mary is the ultimate not only in virtue, but also in knowledge.

Mary, according to Sor Juana, received gifts from God, not corresponding to her personal merits, but by grace. It is through the grace of God that she is preserved from

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12 Of this argument, Tavard states that: “Mary, however, cannot be the lily. ‘Christ is the Lily, and Mary / is like the Lily.’ This refrain of poem 27 illustrates a twofold basic principle of Juana’s Mariology: ‘Mary is not God, but she is / the one who looks most like God.’ . . . Here again the abbot of Clairvaux appears, where hardly anyone would expect him: ‘in his mortification / Bernard has been her image.’ A graded scale thus leads the thought up to God, in that ‘Mary seems like God, / and like Mary the great Bernard’ (Tavard 64-65). It is interesting to note that Tavard translates the lines reading “y en su mortificación, / su imagen Bernardo ha sido” (25-26) to be the image of Mary that Bernard becomes, when in the Spanish this remains vague as ‘su’ is ungendered. Also of interest is Tavard’s statement that Bernard appears “where hardly anyone would expect him.” Not only was St. Bernard especially devoted to the Virgin Mary (he wrote her definitive biography), the poems themselves were written for the commemoration of the inauguration of a Church and Convent dedicated to Bernard. The presence which is surprising in this poem, therefore, is Mary’s and not Bernard’s.

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original sin and from “todos los movimientos de la naturaleza propensa al mal por la
culpa, para que todas sus operaciones fuesen niveladas por la razón sin resistencia de la
parte inferior, y el infundirla el alma y anticiparle la inteligencia antes de los términos
naturales en que Dios estatuyó infundirla a los demás vivientes . . .” (Cruz Ejercicios de
la Encarnación 4: 504) ‘from all the movements of a nature inclined to evil by the fault,
so that all her operations were planned by reason with no resistance of the inferior part,
and his lending her intelligence beyond the natural limits in which God had decided to
infuse it in the other living beings . . . ’(Tavard 99). With this statement, Sor Juana
makes it clear that in her Mariology as a result of Mary’s lack of original sin, Mary has
an intelligence unencumbered by mundane concerns. Consequently, Mary was able to
reach a level of wisdom impossible to any other human being since she was lent a
divine intelligence that leaves the confines of human nature. With this supra-human
intelligence, which she is free to nurture as she receives a heavenly reprieve from the
worries of the mundane world, she can instruct mankind and the angels.

Mary as Sophia

In her Ejercicios de la Encarnación, Sor Juana goes through an argument which
places Mary at the center of Creation. According to Sor Juana, Christ shows his mother
the whole of creation, step by step during Genesis, and Earth has as its main purpose to
adorn her.13 Sor Juana’s view of the Virgin Mary as having been present during the

13 Kirk gives a reading of this text on pages 61-65. Kirk states that in these spiritual exercises, Sor
Juana creates a portrait where “through Mary, the sinless one, all human nature is elevated” (65). For more
on this text, see Georgina Sabat Rivers in “Ejercicios de la encarnación: sobre la imagen de María y la
decisión final de Sor Juana” (Literatura Mexicana 1: 2 [1990]: 349-371).
whole of creation is not original. The view had earlier been expounded upon by Sor María de Agreda--

whose renowned mystical bilocations to New México had attracted the attention of Philip IV and gained her a position as his spiritual and temporal advisor, gained Sor Juana’s attention for her biography of the Virgin Mary, La mística ciudad de Dios [The Mystical City of God] (1670). Both the framework, of a mystical vision in which God shows Mary the mysteries of the universe over the course of nine days, and the feminist Mariolatry of the biography, its exaltation of the Virgin as equal to Christ and as a queen of wisdom, can be seen to bear on Sor Juana’s “Ejercicios devotos para los nueve días antes de la purísima Encarnación del Hijo de Dios” [Devout exercises for the nine days preceding the Most Pure Incarnation of the Son of God] (4.406). (Merrim Early xii)

Given the fact that these theories had already been explicated by such an illustrious mystical figure as the advisor to the king, Sor Juana is more than safe in following them. In the Ejercicios de la Encarnación, Sor Juana portrays Christ giving his mother a guided tour through the stages of creation. According to Sor Juana, Mary witnesses the making of the universe and is privy to all of the secrets of nature. The conclusion of the exercises asserts that it is through the virtue and beauty of Mary that perfection is restored to the whole of creation, as seen earlier in certain poems, and that Mary, because she witnessed the whole of creation, and because God has granted her a supernatural intelligence, learns everything a human being can hope to know and more. Because of Her presence in the acts of creation, Mary becomes the recipient of Holy Wisdom. She becomes the symbol of the limits that the human intellect can attain; she is the embodiment of Hagia Sophia.

In this image, Mary is portrayed as acquiring the ultimate level of wisdom: she was present at Genesis. The Virgin Mary becomes the intellectual connection between
God and man. According to the nun, through the whole of history, learning and teaching becomes Mary’s profession. Sor Juana portrays Mary as a professor to the angels, since she was present at a time when they were not. She writes:

La Soberana Doctora
de las Escuelas divinas,
de que los Angeles todos
dependen sabiduría,
por ser quien inteligencia
mejor de Dios participa,
a leer la suprema sube
Catedra de Teologia. (Cruz, poem 219, 2: 6, 1-8)

The Sovereign Doctor / of the divine Schools / (from which all of the Angels / acquire knowledge) / participating most in the intelligence of God, / by reading the supreme one rises / as Dean of Theology.

The participation in the intelligence of God allows Mary to teach all other beings in creation, including the angels. As the Ejercicios de la Encarnación illustrates, Mary was present from the very beginning; she is the one who is most knowledgeable on theology as well as other sciences. The nimble nun, however, does not stop there in this poem. She insists that Mary, “por Primaria de las ciencias” (9) ‘by being first in the sciences,’ is applauded for her knowledge. In Sor Juana’s poems, “Mary is presented as the most eminent theologian. . . . Through participation in divine life at all different levels, Mary excels across the spectrum of required courses. As first of all creatures,

14 In another poem, Sor Juana presents Mary as “la Maestra Divina, de la Capilla Suprema” (poem 220, 2: 7, 7-8) ‘the Divine Teacher, of the Supreme Chapel.’ This is also found in the tradition of Hagia Sophia where Sophia is depicted as a teacher. For more on this, see Proverbs 8: 1-11 and Cady et al.’s Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality, pages 22-26.

15 Hagia Sophia is depicted, in the Roman Catholic Bibles, as having been present in all of creation. In Proverbs 8: 27-31 Sophia speaks of her presence during creation. The presence of Sophia is also noted in Ecclesiasticus 24: 3-5. For more on this theme, see Susan Cady et al’s Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality, pages 18-21.
she mastered all scientific knowledge. She cultivates theological topics” (Kirk 72). This view of Mary, as a learned woman and as wiser than all of the angels and men, allows Sor Juana to present intellectual capabilities hand in hand with the purity of her role as the Mother of God. Indeed, “Mary is accorded hyperdulia – reverence a little higher than that accorded the angels – but not the latria which is accorded to God alone” (Matthews 307). This position, second only to the Trinity, allows Mary to be honored above all of the saints and angels. However, this elevation in her position among the celestial elite is not just decorative; along with the ascent in the ranks there is an increase in the authority of her figure.

Remarkably, Mary is portrayed by Sor Juana to be a new rhetoric. In the following poem, she places Mary in line with the classical teachers of rhetoric and shows that Mary also follows a tradition. The nun portrays the Virgin Mary as not upsetting the rules of propriety when she redefines and constructs a new format. The Virgin, through her divine grace, simply excels in everything, breaking the old molds. Sor Juana writes,

La Retórica nueva
escuchad, Cursantes,
que con su vista sola persuáde,
y en su mirar luciente
tiene cifrado todo lo elocuente,
pues robando de todos las atenciones,
con Demóstenes mira y Cicerones. (poem 223, 2: 12, 1-7)

The new Rhetoric / listen to, Students, / that with her sight alone she persuades, / and in her lucid look / she has encoded all that is eloquent, / that demanding from all their attentions, / she sees with Demosthenes and Cicero.
Like a muse, Mary embodies the inspiration behind knowledge. Unlike a muse, however, Mary is an active force in knowledge, teaching it and shaping it. What is more, as will be seen, Mary comes to define knowledge.

The depiction of Mary that the nun presents is of a Mary that participates in the existing intellectual traditions much in the same way that Sor Juana does. Sor Juana’s Mary, following the lead of the classical greats, becomes a master at what she attempts. In this poem, as in many other of her works, Sor Juana depicts the Mother of God as more than a docile recipient of knowledge: Mary is characterized as an active teacher. Sor Juana tackles the problem of interfacing classical knowledge with religious teachings. Mary, in this depiction, serves not just as a teacher, but also the bridge between the texts of the pagan world and the Christian world. She states,

Para quien quisiere oír
o aprender a bien hablar,
y lo quiere conseguir,
María sabe enseñar
el arte de bien decir. (Cruz, poem 223, 2: 13, 8-12)

For whoever wants to listen / or learn to speak well, / and wants to achieve it, / Mary knows how to teach / the art of speaking well.

Sor Juana constructs the rest of the poem around the comparison of rhetorical devices and Mary’s life. The nun portrays Mary’s life as a deftly constructed divine argument which boils down to the Word: “que su Retórica toda / a sólo un Verbo reduce” (61-62) ‘that all of her Rhetoric / is reduced only to the Word.’ Her sanctity, her wisdom, and the grace from God make the Virgin Mary an argument for Christ, for the Word Incarnated. The importance of seeing Mary as participatory in the classical fields of
teaching lies in the constant battle that Sor Juana waged against those who saw learning as a threat to *Sancta Simplicitas*. Mary, in this depiction, is a new argument, a point to be made, and a tool for the intellectually ambitious nun to extricate herself from a difficult position. The Virgin Mary, in this scenario, is not just to be seen as the teacher of rhetoric, but as rhetoric itself, as a lesson to be learned. Mary is the embodiment of knowledge as both the mediator and the message.

Not only is Mary the teacher of knowledge and knowledge herself, but her own virtues can also be described in academic terms. The description of the Virgin Mary through terms outside of the religious removes Mary from the traditional context in which she was discussed and places her within the intellectual realm. Written for the feast of the Ascension in 1690, Sor Juana describes the virtues of Mary utilizing geometric terms. She writes:

> En Buena Filosofía
> es el centro de la Tierra
> un punto sólo, que dista
> igual de toda la Esfera.
> Luego si algo hasta él bajara
> y de ahi pasar quisiera,
> subiera, en vez de bajar,
> hacia la circunferencia.
> Esto pasa hoy en María,
> que al tocar la línea extrema
> de la Humildad, por bajarse,
> pasa del centro y se eleva. (Cruz, poem 307, 2: 154, 1-12)

> In Good Philosophy / the center of the Earth / is only one point, which is / equidistant from the whole Sphere. / Now, if something is to descend toward it / and desires to pass through it, / it would ascend, instead of descend, / toward the circumference. / This is what now happens with Mary, / that in touching the paramount line / of Humility, descending, / she passes the center and rises.
Through this description of Mary's humility using academic terms, Sor Juana accentuates the association between Mary and intellect. The virtue of humility, a staple in Marian poetry, is extolled. However, by using scholastic terms to provide a description, Sor Juana moves away from intuition and meekness, and toward rational thinking.

Juana, in one of her poems, depicts Mary as the provider of her intellectual gifts. The nun writes a poem in dedication to Mary in which she clearly states that the poem comes from the very gift that the Mother of God has granted her. In this way, in the writings of Sor Juana, Mary becomes not only a muse-like figure and a teacher but also the giver of intellectual skills and knowledge. As the only mediator from the divine to the human, the Virgin Mary is now also the patron deity of intellectual ability. Sor Juana states:

Hoy, Virgen bella, ha querido
a vuestra piés mi afición
ofrecer el mismo don
que de Vos me recibido. (poem 250, 2: 60, 1-4)

Today, beautiful Virgin, my devotion / has desired to offer at your feet /
the same gift / that from You I have received.

The poem travels from Sor Juana back to its source: the source of the nun’s intellectual ability is identified as the Virgin Mary. By claiming that she has received her literary gift from Mary, Sor Juana aligns herself with what she has defined as the source of mankind’s knowledge in her works. Mary Mother of God becomes more than the virtuous example for women, she becomes the essential source for knowledge and skill.
for all mankind. By presenting Mary as the giver of knowledge to mankind, Sor Juana returns to the tradition of *Hagia Sophia*, where knowledge takes a feminine face.

Though Sor Juana does not use the Greek word “Sophia,” one can see that her view of Mary, as the communicator of wisdom, adds credibility to the theory that Sor Juana was actively participating in this tradition. The likeness between Sor Juana’s rendition of the Virgin Mary and Sophia is implied in the way that the nun portrays Mary as teacher. This likeness, however, reaches a new level when Mary is described as present during the whole of creation. Sophia, as seen from the earlier biblical writings of the Old Testament, “is at the heart of all things coming into being; Sophia is Wisdom itself. This, of course, is not an obvious connection for the twentieth century mind. But Sophia as creative and Sophia as wisdom are very closely associated for the biblical writers. . . . Sophia is wisdom, both as content and process” (Cady 21). Sor Juana mirrors this depiction of Sophia in her depictions of Mary: to Sor Juana, Mary is the teacher/provider of knowledge as well as knowledge itself. This is parallel to the case of Sophia as, according to tradition, “people are not just to learn from her, they are to learn her” (Cady 25). It is in this way that Sor Juana represents Mary, as both teacher and wisdom and as a new version of Sophia.

The tradition of *Hagia Sophia*, though very popular in the early stages of Christianity and present in some of the letters of Jerome, is found only in traces by the time Sor Juana wrote. Presently, it is stated that “recent feminist work has recovered and rediscovered the submerged early Christian tradition of Wisdom-Sophia, which has been almost completely erased from the memory of Western Christianity” (Fiorenza
Sor Juana tapped into this underlying, yet shrouded, idea of wisdom and knowledge as feminine and applied it to the Virgin Mary. The view of Hagia Sophia, as provided by the Book of Wisdom, renders a portrait very similar to the one Sor Juana sketches of the Virgin Mary in the *Ejercicios de la Encarnación*. In the Book of Wisdom, according to Fiorenza, Divine Wisdom is clearly shown as a partner with God, or as she states:

> Even a cursory reading of the biblical discourses on Divine Wisdom shows how this tradition struggles to characterize Woman Wisdom as an all-powerful divine figure without falling into ditheism, i.e., belief in two gods. . . This comes to the fore especially in the depiction of Divine Sophia in the Wisdom of Solomon: Divine Sophia has her residence in heaven. She is the glory of God (Wisd. 7: 25-26), mediator of creation (Wisd. 8: 5-6), and shares the throne of God (Wisd. 9: 3). . . She is an initiate into the knowledge of God, collaborator in God’s work, the brightness that streams from everlasting light, a pure effervescence of divine glory, and the image of God’s goodness. In short, Divine Wisdom lives symbiotically with God (Wisd. 8: 3f.; 7: 26). Kinship with Wisdom brings immortality and friendship with her, resulting in pure delight (Wisd. 10: 17). (Fiorenza 135-6)


\(^{17}\) It is important to note that Mary is not the only one whom Sor Juana portrays with such divine terminology. Though Mary is the one that Sor Juana depicts herself as a believer of, Sor Juana does portray other mythical figures, such as Isis, as powerful and full of glory. Octavio Paz provides a reading of the usage of Isis that leads to a questioning of Sor Juana’s satisfaction with her gender identity (112, 217-241). However, the use of such figures could be seen as an admiration, on the part of the poet, for feminine figures that embody wisdom. It has been pointed out that, “several scholars have suggested that Hellenistic Jewish wo/men in Egypt conceived of Divine Wisdom as prefigured in the language and image
short, like the Mary portrayed by Sor Juana, Sophia, in Hebrew tradition, is “a co-
creator with the Hebrew God, she is a heavenly queen, she is a messenger from God,
and she is God’s lover” (Cady 32). The likenesses between Sor Juana’s Mary and the
Sophia found in the ancient texts seem too great to be coincidental.

Since the tradition of *Hagia Sophia* is older than the existence of Christ, it is not
hard to imagine that it would inform the depiction of Mary and Christ. As a modern
scholar states:

> the ancestral voice of the earth sounds through Mary who is, after all, the
> kinswoman of all people, since she is a human being who became the
> Mother of God. It is within Catholic tradition that Mary has been most
> usually pied with Sophia. Sapiental images pepper the liturgies and
> devotions to Mary in such a way that outsiders might well be forgiven
> for assuming that one was the other. (Matthews 307)

Clearly, the Catholic tradition associates Sophia and the Virgin Mary. It is important to
note, however, that, despite the similarities, the figure of Sophia is much larger and
more powerful than even Sor Juana’s depiction of Mary. As defined in the ancient texts,
Sophia, in Christian terms, would be a power shared by Mary, Jesus, and the Holy
Ghost.  

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of Goddesses like Isis, Athena, or Dike. Like the Goddess Isis, Divine Wisdom uses the proclamatory ‘I
am’ style for proclaiming her universal message of salvation” (Fiorenza 136). Does Sor Juana utilize such
figures as allusions to Sophia? Or do they, in and of themselves, seize a place in the poet’s imagination?

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18 Soloviev, a Russian mystic who claims to have had three meetings with Sophia, sees the nature
of Sophia as encompassing more than one Christian entity. As is stated, “Soloviev fully recognized the
dual appearance of Sophia through the persons of Jesus and Mary as a joint expression” (Matthews 295).
In the discussion of Sophia as found in Christian tradition, it is stated that “according to a whole series of
New Testament texts, Jesus is Sophia” (Cady 38).
The Power of “She” and the Sameness of “He”

Within the realm of feminine wisdom and virtue, Sor Juana portrays the good of God in feminine, active terms. Without naming Mary, Sor Juana’s religious poetry evidences a shift away from the terms that define grace as masculine. In order to create a view of the sacred that is feminine in gender, as Kirk states, the nun resorts to “manipulation of grammatical gender when naming the divine” (59). In a poem celebrating the incarnation of the word, Sor Juana uses the term “palabra,” which is feminine, instead of the traditional “verbo,” which is masculine. She then proceeds to refer to “palabra” through pronouns making the divine answer to “she,” or “ella.” This would appear to be minimal, since it is all couched in a dogmatically religious context. However, this tactic has been seen to be challenging by some. Kirk states that

the use of the pronoun ella, especially when distanced from its referent noun, has the effect of connecting the discourse with feminine reality. Editor Méndez Plancarte, reveals his discomfort at this unusual usage and takes pains to “correct” it six times in his notes on the first thirty lines of this poem. He also refers the reader to another of her poems in which the “same mistake” is made. (60)

The fact that the famed critic, Méndez Plancarte, who was a cleric, was taken aback by the usage of the feminine referent shows that this also is to be considered a rhetorical strategy. Surely there would have been many clerics of her time who would have been uncomfortable to refer to the Word as “ella.” In his reaction to this “oversight,” the famed critic provides a very valuable insight to those studying both feminist theology and women writers. This insight, the fact that even modern critics would prefer to
believe that such phrasing is a product of error and not of rhetoric, is significant in helping to contextualize existing criticism.

Is Sor Juana aware of the discomfort that will be produced by the grammatical aspects of her poem? It appears so, as Sor Juana prefaces this poem with the following lines:

Oigan una Palabra, señores, oigan, 
que yo les doy la mía, de no hablar otra;  
y que si otra les dijere,  
me desmienta quien quisiere;  
pues si a buena luz se mira, 
cualquier palabra es mentira 
que esta Palabra no fuere. (poem 359, 2: 222, 1-7)

Listen to a Word, sirs, listen, / for I will give you mine, and that of no other will I speak; / and if I tell you another, / whoever wants will disprove me; / since when seen in a good light / any word is a lie / when it is not this Word.

Keeping in mind that the nun is using the feminine form of the word “Word,” and not digressing from dogma, Sor Juana dares the reader to find a fault in her poem. She plainly states that the Truth is what she intends to state; should she state anything else, it would be easily disproved when studied. What she is doing is not heresy since it is not questioning the nature of the accepted theology. It is simply going against the standard, yet not decreed, use of the masculine for the “Word.”

There are various ways to look upon Sor Juana’s feminization of the divine. The play on the word “palabra” exists throughout the poem. Unlike the word “verbo,” which outside of the religious meaning commonly translates into “verb,” “palabra,” as the vernacular of “word,” lends itself to the baroque amusement of word play. This alone
stylistically justifies her usage of the feminine. In the lines already cited, Sor Juana
states that she gives her word not to speak of any other word (line 2). In lines such as,

“Y nadie puede dudar . . . que hombre de palabra sea, / quien se hizo Hombre de
Palabra” (26-27) ‘And no one can doubt . . . that it is a man of his word / who became a
Man of the Word,’ one can see the desired word play. However, in other lines such as,

“. . . Ella es quien cumple / lo que la Escritura manda” (22-23) ‘. . . She is who
accomplishes / what Scripture commands,’ one can also see the cleric’s reason for
objection since the power is clearly referred to as feminine in nature. As in many other
places in her writing, Sor Juana delights in blurring the demarcation between following
tradition and challenging it. Her depiction of the “Word” in this poem can be seen in
conjunction with the depiction of Mary as a powerful and active force: both are meant
to give a feminine face to Divinity.

Returning to Mary, however, it is important to note that Sor Juana does not
simply elevate Mary as knowledgeable or pure. She also ties Mary to her own body of a
woman, elevating the worth of women’s bodies. While the Mother of God rises to her
position as a Dean in the University of the Angels, she never leaves behind her beauty
as a woman.19 Her body, which, like Jesus, ascended with her to Heaven, is always
depicted as beautiful and holy. Tavard states that

19 Mary’s motherhood is celebrated in the poetry of Sor Juana. Her motherhood is praised and her
love as a mother is glorified in various poems. This is not to be seen as a celebration of motherhood in
general, however, since Mary was a virgin and the Mother of God himself. In a poem celebrating Mary’s
sacred motherhood (Cruz, poem 277, 2: 101) Sor Juana clearly states that the maternity of Mary is proof
of Mary’s greatness. Mary’s motherhood brings her divine knowledge as well as the divine power to help
mankind through grace and through mediation. Sor Juana does not make this a general claim on
motherhood.
beauty—here the word is primor—is never far from Juana’s concerns. The beauty of “the divine Dawn,” universal, encompasses the whole created world. In a bold image, Juana Inés likens Mary’s womb (the Spanish word vientre, like the Latin venter, means “womb,” “belly,” and “pregnancy”) to the harvested wheat of the universal sacrament of the eucharist and to the monstrance of eucharistic festivities. (63)

Sor Juana has an obvious interest in not minimizing the fact that Mary was both human and female. Even in her state of absolute purity, Mary never quit being a woman and functioning as such. The aesthetic concerns fall into the concerns that filled the works of the Baroque era.

It is in this context, of glorifying the Virgin’s female, sinless body, that Sor Juana celebrates the pregnant body of a woman. Sor Juana does not discuss women’s body in any other context. In Sor Juana’s writing, there are few allusions to the human body. However, the holy function of Mary’s body, which Sor Juana often refers to as the best temple of God, is celebrated in the following poem:

De trigo comparado
es la parva hermosa,
de la Divina Esposa
el Vientre delicado,
que representa a Dios Sacramentado.

20 There are a couple of poems written specifically in celebration of a birthday or baptism of the child of her patrons the Marqueses de la Laguna, where Sor Juana also celebrates motherhood. In the poem celebrating his baptism, Sor Juana writes to the mother, “que en tu religión, Señora, / aunque tu beldad lo engendra, / no querrás llamarle tuyo, / menos que de Dios lo sea” (poem 24, 1: 71, 5-8) ‘that in your religion, Lady, / even though your beauty engenders him, / you do not want to call it yours / unless he be God’s.’ This view intrinsically ties motherhood and religion. However, there are no writings which celebrate the general condition of motherhood in women.

21 In the poems commemorating the dedication of a Church built by the nuns of the order of St. Bernard, the opening line refers to Mary as the best or greatest temple of God. It reads, “Si es María el mejor Templo / de Dios ...” (Cruz, poem 323, 2: 182, 1-2) ‘If Mary is the best Temple / of God ...’ In poem 355, written for Mary, Sor Juana writes of a young Mary going to worship at a temple and asks “¿a qué Templo de Dios va, / siendo Ella su mejor Templo?” (2: 218, 10-11) ‘to what Temple of God is she going, when She is his finest Temple?’
Luego su Vientre hermoso
es el Viril sagrado,
que lo tiene guardado
y aprisiona amoroso
con más decencia que el metal precioso. (Cruz, poem 347, 2: 209, 1-10)

Compare with the wheat’s
beautiful stack
the Divine Bride’s
delicate Womb
that conceives the Sacramented God.
Then her beautiful Womb
is the sacred Monstrance
that keeps it sheltered [see Tavard 63]
and lovingly imprisons [it]
with more purity than precious metal.

Since Mary’s body was pure, devoid of any sin, including original sin, alluding to her body as a Holy Temple is quite acceptable. Once again, Mary is portrayed as not only the intellectual connection between mankind and God, but also the physical one (as the temple). Much like the Monstrance, the container which keeps the body of Christ for the unification of man and God during Mass, Mary is the physical container of the Word for the redemption of mankind. Moreover, of utmost importance is the fact that Mary’s body is elevated alongside her virtue and knowledge. Through the elevation of the Virgin Mary and her body, Sor Juana brings equality to the sexes.22

Another way she ascribes equality between the sexes is by attributing feminine virtues to the men in her poetry. In so doing, Sor Juana subjugates men’s bodies to the same rules that govern women’s bodies. There is a definite “true for me, true for you”

22 This poem, with its emphasis on Mary’s body, counters the argument that Sor Juana disdained or sought to escape from the reality of the female body. Of Sor Juana’s approach to her own physical existence, it seems safer to assert that the nun does not deny the importance of her body, she just elevates the importance of her intellect.
attitude in some of Sor Juana's texts. One way that Sor Juana found to equalize male
and female, even on the sacred level, is by implying "that the call to virtue rests equally
on men and women. Mary, yes, was virgin but so was Jesus. Sor Juana has the
anguished Mary viewing with 'virginal eyes' the 'virginal body' of her son exposed on
the cross (O.C. 4: 507). St. Joseph was also a virgin" (Kirk 68). The mention of Jesus's
and Joseph's virginity should not alarm since they were holy and would have had to be
virgins by definition. Once again, Sor Juana did not venture into the field of heresy: she
simply opted to emphasize a point that is usually left silent. However, Sor Juana did not
note only the virtues dealing with the body; in her poetry "Joseph is also portrayed as
having other virtues traditionally exalted in Mary. Like her, he was obedient to the
voice of an angel" (Kirk 68). By showing that it is also a virtue in men to be meek and
silent virgins, Sor Juana challenges the notions of virtue appropriate for women as
compared to those appropriate for men. Sor Juana's Mariology, therefore, is not
complete without the equalizing of the genders through the subtle affirmation of a
universal virtue.

Sor Juana in the Shadow of Mary

Sor Juana’s portrayal of the Virgin Mary as an active figure, as a recipient and
conveyor of knowledge, and as someone more than a recipient of fate, participates in
the existing Marian tradition. Sor Juana in no way was doing something original.23

23 As Pamela Kirk points out, in her poetry on Mary, Sor Juana was participating in traditions of
both style and in content. She states, "just as Sor Juana, in her liturgical poetry, is following the literary
traditions of the immensely popular and highly developed villancico, so too, in her Mariology, she is part
of a theological tradition which exalts Mary and emphasizes her power" (Kirk 60).
However, the way that this nun decided to participate in these existing traditions shows that she did not just follow tradition blindly and without an interest to embed a personal message in her texts. Though Sor Juana’s treatment of Mary would make it seem that this would be an ideal way for women writers within the Catholic tradition to justify and liberate themselves from arbitrary social limitations, this was not the case. It is shocking to see that

Contrary to what one might expect, Sor Juana’s emphasis on Mary is not typical of major women religious writers. Though Marian piety is one of the identifying marks of Catholicism, evidence of her role in the works of outstanding women religious writers has been ambivalent... a study by Donald Bell and Rudolf Weinstein covering the period from 1000 to 1700 reveals that only about a third of the female saints were characterized as especially devoted to Mary.24 (Tavard 58)

The figure of Mary, in the practical social aspects of the Catholic tradition, did not challenge any of the beliefs routinely held about women. As the above quoted study indicates, most of the women within the Catholic tradition who wrote, including Teresa de Avila, neither worshiped Mary in any special way nor used her figure to expand their options.

This is to be seen in direct contrast to Sor Juana’s treatment of Mary which is meant to liberate women from the oppression of Sancta Simplicitas. Pamela Kirk notes that all of Sor Juana’s religious poetry functions with Mary as its core. She states that “nearly all of the nun’s religious poems are connected to Mary in some form. Except for her two sequences for the Feast of St. Peter (1677 and 1683), all are either for

24 The study by Weinstein and Bell is in Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
Marian feasts . . . or related to events . . . or people connected with Mary . . . or with male saints who had a special devotion to Mary . . .” (Kirk 57). The poetry for St. Bernard clearly falls into this category. In almost all of her religious works, Sor Juana finds a way to aggrandize and invigorate the figure of Mary through subtle redefinition. In fact, in one case Sor Juana chose to aggrandize Mary so much that the nuns who had ordered the texts chose not to utilize them because the celebration was supposed to be for St. Bernard.

The aspects of Mary that are typically praised were not the active ones that Sor Juana focuses on. As Kirk states, “Mary has long been proposed to the Catholic faithful as the model woman. Typically her virginity, obedience, humility, and silence have been extolled” (66). It is the meek and humble nature of the figure of Mary which has been conveyed as the ideal of womanhood. That Sor Juana converts the figure of Mary into a dynamic and forceful one is, as can be seen, uncommon. The unconventional Marianism found in Sor Juana’s writings shows Mary to be powerful and knowledgeable without taking away any of her traditionally attributed virtues such as chastity and obedience.

25 The portrayal of Mary as meek and submissive has been used for a long time “as a means of domesticating women” (Kirk 67). This is explored further in Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary by Marina Warner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Elizabeth A. Johnson sees that the figure of the Virgin Mary has allowed for the truncation of “the ideal of feminine fulfillment and wholeness” (“The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women,” Horizons 12.1 [1985]: 116-135). The three ways that “malestream mariology” portrays the ideal woman according to Fiorenza, are: “first, by emphasizing virginity to the detriment of sexuality; second, by unilaterally associating the ideal of ‘true womanhood’ with motherhood; and, third, by religiously valorizing obedience, humility, passivity, and submission as the cardinal virtues of women” (164-5). It is easy to see how Sor Juana challenges these notions through her texts as well as her life.

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This is not to say, however, that the manner in which the Virgin was represented in the writings of Sor Juana caused any difficulties within the extremely dogmatic community of the Catholic clergy during the time of the Inquisition. The treatment of Mary that Sor Juana provided in her poems, of Mary with exalted virtue and knowledge, pleased the higher-ups within the Catholic Church of New Spain. This is evident in the fact that some bishops chose to keep her busy writing for Mary-related festivities. As it is pointed out, “Juana Inés’s treatment of the theme of Mary’s assumption must have pleased the canons of México City who were responsible for the cathedral, and presumably the successive archbishops as well, for the Hieronymite nun was invited four times to compose villancicos for the feast—in 1676, 1679, 1685, and 1690” (Tavard 81). That Sor Juana was repeatedly asked and compensated for poems on the Virgin Mary to be read publicly in masses means that her message, of a powerful and intellectual Mary, was not considered subversive or indecorous.

Though not heretical, the treatment of Mary in the nun’s text was challenging, as can be seen from the unease it brought about in some of her clerical readers. Whether this is to be considered feminist rhetoric is an arguable point. The anachronistic nature of such terminology as applied to Sor Juana, and also to the fact that Sor Juana did not argue that every woman should have liberties but only those who were capable of handling them, makes the identification of her work as “feminist” difficult yet not impossible, if this category is to be expanded to include works from the past. Regardless, it is obvious to see that her writings are intended to question the
accepted norms, to challenge them, and to create a better situation for women in both society in general and in religion. As Kirk expresses it:

A comparison of Sor Juana’s interpretation with the conventional rendering of Mary in effect shows her feminist consciousness at work, taking advantage of material of traditional Mariology and popular devotion to create a religious symbolic system that has at its center a female figure of power and radiance, nearly a goddess. In so doing Sor Juana can be said to “be mining the golden mother lode of the Marian tradition in order to retrieve female imagery and language about the holy mystery of God.” (Kirk 59)

Sor Juana never questioned the Catholic Faith. The Inquisition censors would have quickly noticed that. The nun, notwithstanding her alignment with dogma, produced an alternative understanding of her faith that did not hinder her intellectual ambitions despite her gender. This understanding encompassed all areas of theology and allowed her the right to write.26

The view of Mary as a justification, as a “new rhetoric” for women, can be seen in the rhetoric that Sor Juana uses in her writing. The nun, unlike other women of religious vocations, relied on the classical forms of knowledge to give weight to her writings. It is vital to point out that unlike other religious women writers, Sor Juana

26 The co-opting of tradition in such a way as to allow for freedom is far from being a unique feature belonging only to Sor Juana. In the more modern era, this same acceptance of basic dogma, with alterations made to allow for action, can be seen in such figures as Sojourner Truth. Echoes of Sor Juana’s mariology can be found in Sojourner Truth, as it is noted that she “points out, on the one hand, that the incarnation of Christ must be correctly understood as the collaboration of God and a woman. On the other hand she stresses that redemption from sinful structures can be experienced only when women come together and organize for turning the ‘world rightside up’ again. She accepts the claim of patriarchal theology and traditional doctrine that woman caused original sin but draws a different conclusion from it. Precisely because a woman was implicated in the original fall, she insists, women must get together to right the perversion of the world since a woman was ‘strong enough to turn the world upside down’”(Fiorenza 59). This is a reading of a Sojourner Truth address to a suffrage gathering in Akron, Ohio in 1852. Either way, as depicted by Sor Juana or Sojourner Truth, women are empowered and active forces.
does not derive authority from mystical visions. This further emphasizes her belief in women's intellectual ability. Kirk states that

Whereas most women religious writers like Maria of Agreda and Teresa of Avila drew their authority from mystical experience, Sor Juana writes with the authority that comes from her intellectual and literary talents. Neither does she need to appeal to the mystical experience of the reader as a basis for understanding what she writes. Because she draws on both intellectual and on devotional traditions, her religious writing is open to the educated reason of the elite, as well as the imaginative intuitive understanding of the uneducated populace. (65)

The style that Sor Juana chose to write in, with a heavy reliance on her classical education, not only allowed her writings to participate in existing traditions; it also allowed for increased readability and, therefore, increased sales. In this way, Sor Juana emulates her own depiction of Mary Mother of God in that, as a poet, she does not rely merely on the intuited or felt; instead, she draws from divinely inspired intelligence and acquired knowledge.27 This style of writing supports in deeds what she claims is true in content.

Critics have mentioned that Sor Juana, though Mexican, does not write specifically of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Sor Juana explicitly mentions the Virgin of Guadalupe only once in her writings on Mary.28 However, she may have relied on the

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27 Following this line of thought (concerning the value of intelligence and knowledge as found in Sor Juana's writing) it can be said that she did more than participate in existing traditions: she helped pave the road for new ones to be formed. It is noted that "Among others, Goethe was to exercise considerable influence over Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) when he came to found his school of Anthroposophy in the early twentieth century. Anthroposophy literally means 'the wisdom of man' and the movement is dedicated to the understanding of the human spiritual nature" (Matthews 285). If this is the case, then Sor Juana, and her Sueño in specific, should be counted as a founding ‘father’ in the investigations of human intellectual limitations in light of the spiritual.

28 The poem on the Virgin of Guadalupe (Cruz, poem 206, 1: 310), though providing specifics on the Virgin of Guadalupe, still refers to Mary as the "Inteligencia soberana" (7) while depicting her defeating a dragon (5-6).
image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a pictorial image of Mary; “more to the point, Juana’s frequent encomia of the Virgin’s pregnancy, like her repeated mention of Mary’s beautiful belly, tally perfectly with the picture of Guadalupe, in which Mary is visibly pregnant” (Tavard 97). Due to Sor Juana’s previously noted awareness of the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the silence found in her works concerning this most sacred of Mexican symbols has astonished some: “Given her sensitivity to indigenous customs and languages, and given what has been termed her incipient Mexican nationalism, Sor Juana’s near total neglect of the Virgin of Guadalupe, symbol of Mexican nationalism, and emblem of the conversion of the indigenous, is difficult to fathom” (Kirk S4). Other critics, attempting to alleviate the silence of the texts of Sor Juana, state that the nun used the region’s native culture in describing Mary. Tavard states that “it would be odd if not in México, where the Aztecs had been great astronomers, that Juana Inés would then expound on the ‘highest wisdom’ of the Virgin Mary, who ‘knew by most perfect intuition all the natures and qualities of all those lights’” (97). Kirk (57) and Tavard (98) state that there is a possibility that the lack of mention of a specific Mary may be in keeping with baroque conceptism.

Sor Juana has allusions that could be referring to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but she does not refer to her by name. Could it be because she had an eye to be published in Spain? Critics have noted that many of the Marian poetry of the era did not emphasize a singular Mary. With the idea that Sor Juana is using the figure of Mary to reflect on the role of women in society, the nun may have been attempting to portray Mary not as a unique entity, but as model for women in general. Sor Juana’s apparent predilection to keep away from naming specific sites for cult devotion would only enhance the view that Sor Juana wanted to present a figure of Mary that could be emulated by all women.
In the texts dealing with Mary, Sor Juana creates an image of the Virgin that urged the intellectual rights and abilities of women. By crafting an image of Mary as an active agent in the battle against evil, Sor Juana redefines the idea of virtue for women. The coexistence of virtue, wisdom, and militant courage that Sor Juana attributes to Mary challenges the limitations that society placed on women. By portraying Mary as an active agent, fighting as a knight in the name of God, Sor Juana counters the idea that meekness is the only possible ideal for women.

Sor Juana begins her depiction of the feminine face of wisdom and virtue by basing her argument on Mary, Mother of God. It is through the figure of Mary that Sor Juana can challenge commonly held notions about women. By depicting Mary as devoid of all sin, even original sin, and by depicting Mary’s worth as so great that God loved her as an individual, the nun can then argue that whatever Mary does, she does because women ought to do so. The nun depicts Mary as an active figure who physically fights evil. She also shows Mary to be the un-doer of the ills caused by Eve. With this, the poet vindicates women and demands they be seen on the same level as men. By stating that Mary was present at creation, that she is the most God-like of humans, and that her knowledge is unsurpassable by men and angels, the nun portrays Mary as a second Adam. Mary is knowledge and a teacher of knowledge in a way that is reminiscent of Hagia Sophia. This transforms the definition of virtuous women from the behaviorally subservient pattern and toward a realm in which women can be virtuous as much for what they do as for what they do not do. The Virgin Mary that Sor Juana depicts urges women to participate in the intellectual realm that tradition
prohibited to them. The portrayal of knowledge and its transmission as feminine
provided the nun a divine precedent to follow in her quest to solidify her right to write.
Chapter 6. *Speculum: Mythical Role Models*

Though Sor Juana depicts Mary as the ultimate and incontestable figure of both knowledge and virtue, the nun also provides a long list of mortal women of antiquity as examples of women who combined incontestable virtue and active lives. Sor Juana does not give as exemplary figures those women who withstood adversity through meekness and humility, but instead, those who dynamically defined themselves and their lives through their deeds. All of the women she portrays are famous for their choice to live (and sometimes die) according to their own convictions. Moving from the women found in the religious tradition to those found in pagan mythology, Sor Juana argues the case for respecting the intellect of women according to their individual virtue.

In so doing, Sor Juana argues her own case. At Sor Juana’s convenience is a plethora of themes that she could choose from to serve her as fodder for her works. Sor Juana takes a special interest in the wise women, *mujeres sabias*, of canonical texts, and these feminine figures appear frequently in all of her writings. The nun does not glorify women in general, but only the great women of renown. Sor Juana focuses her attention on those women who transcended their roles as women and achieved greatness. Sor Juana does not mention the feminine, abhorrent figures such as Medea, Medusa, and the like, proving that her interest does not lie in all women who are active forces in their own lives, but only in those women who through a virtuous life transcend social limitations. The nun chooses to focus on women who challenged the norm by excelling in an unprecedented manner.

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Through the use of famous figures, Sor Juana creates an environment in which it is possible for women to transcend social limitations through virtue. This chapter begins its study with the nun’s depiction of the sanctified women of the Catholic Tradition, in the figure of St. Catherine and the wise women of the Old Testament, and progresses to the depiction of virtuous women of pagan culture. Portraying Mary as the source of human knowledge, Sor Juana presents great women of the past as earthly reflections of Mary.

In many of her texts, Sor Juana writes of *mujeres sabias*, the wise women, of antiquity which provide the backdrop for her own right to intellectual freedom. It is in this realm that it can be seen that Sor Juana participates in the tradition of the *speculum* or the *querelle des femmes*. It is clear through her works that Sor Juana read and emulated other writers, such as Christine de Pizan, within the literary tradition of depicting the lives of famous women as a defense of women in general. Through the figure of St. Catherine, Sor Juana portrays women as simultaneously capable of being beautiful, having divine knowledge, and exceeding in virtue. St. Catherine, in the nun’s texts, shows that the intellectual capacity of a soul is un-gendered. In some of her poetry and in her *Respuesta*, Sor Juana uses literary tradition as her fundamental shelter by referring to the classical authors and their portrayal of feminine mythical figures of Greece and Rome. Her use of the images of classical feminine figures, such as Julia, Portia, Lucretia, and many others, allows Sor Juana to link secular virtue with fame and courage. The many short poems written in these women’s honor are accompanied with
her use of these same figures in longer works such as *El Sueño*, where the classical feminine figures guide the narrator’s way through the universe of knowledge.

*Querelle des Femmes*

The literary tradition of the *querelle des femmes* in which Sor Juana participated had its beginnings with the famous work of Christine de Pizan, the *Book of the City of Ladies*. This text was written explicitly in the defense of women and feminine virtue. This book, a collection of stories detailing the lives of virtuous women, becomes the foundation for future literary works that attempt to counter the maligning of women in literature and in society in general.

In European literary tradition, there were a great many books written to inform the reader of proper behavior through the examples given by great figures of the past. Though these books existed in different forms and styles, they were uniform in purpose: the recounting of lives, either secular, religious, or mythological, in order to present to the reader an ideal pattern to follow. “These example-books,” states one critic, “although differing from one another in the number and length of the tales, show great similarity in manner and matter. This is accounted for by the substantial unity of purpose on the part of the collectors” (Mosher 7). Exempla were accepted as an

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1 It is stated that “the *querelle des femmes*, it is well known, formally began with Christine de Pizan’s defense of women in her 1402-4 *Book of the City of Ladies* . . .” (Merrim *Early* xv). However, even Christine de Pizan had a literary tradition which she could follow. This is not to say, however, that the *querelle des femmes* was not already an existing tradition. According to some, the *querelle des femmes* was a tradition as old as time. “C’est, du reste, une vieille querelle, aussi ancienne que le monde,” states one critic, “puisqu’elle commença à l’aurore de l’humanité, au moment où notre première mère tendit la pomme à notre premier père, et elle durera sans doute jusqu’à la fin des âges. Pour en arriver tout de suite à une période voisine de celle qui nous intéresse, nous dirons que les origines immédiates de péripéties de ce grand débat, au XVIe siècle, nous sont surtout fournies par l’histoire littéraire du siècle précédent” (Lefranc 253).
effective way to communicate moral messages. They played an important part not only as a literary tradition, but also as part of the religious tradition.²

Exempla books, such as the *Speculum speculationum*, written in the 12th century by Alexander Neckam, instructed kings and other members of the aristocracy on proper behavior.³ With Pizan’s creation of the *Book of the City of Ladies*, women officially entered into the realm of the *speculum*. The existence of exempla books about women, the collection of stories of women famous for their exemplary lives, provided a literary genre which allowed the silent half of the population a defense through precedent. As a critic aptly notes: “the evocation of an exemplary figure constitutes that textual moment at which the authority of the past is brought to bear on the reader’s response to the text. The exemplar can be seen as a kind of textual node or point of juncture, where a given author’s interpretation of the past overlaps with the desire to form and fashion readers” (Hampton 3). The example as provided by a famous figure was an efficient and traditional literary tool.

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² In religion, the book of exempla was used as a pedagogic device, as “both collectors and preachers were encouraged by the writers of treatises on the art of preaching, to gather and employ exempla” (Mosher 14).

The pioneering work in the literary tradition of the *querelle des femmes* is Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*. This text, written to counter an extremely misogynous version of the *Roman de la Rose*, spawned feminist debates in several countries and languages that lasted well into the seventeenth century and that were conducted by women and men in genres as varied as histories, conduct books, pamphlets, letters, dialogues, romances, sermons, and treatises on government. The *querelle* as set by Christine de Pizan became the bedrock and staple of early modern feminist discourse on gender difference in Europe. (Merrim *Early xv*)

In this revolutionary book, the way in which the City of Ladies is built is through stories that support the notion that women were worthy of an education and were not, as some would have it, devoid of virtue.

In the *Book of the City of Ladies*, Pizan presents herself as the narrator who writes on the behest of three divine ladies. These three ladies, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, tell Christine to defend the reputation of women by building a City of Ladies. Stories of ladies with wisdom, honesty, loyalty, and sanctity are told in order to build the foundation and the buildings (through Reason), to populate the city (through Rectitude), and to put in her place its Queen, the Virgin Mary (through Justice). The tales that are told in this collection challenge the misogynous notion of women by “endowing historical, legendary, literary, mythical, and biblical women with an equal degree of reality, in their catalogs of illustrious females they cited exemplary women who belie and defy misogynous constructions of the female sex” (Merrim *Early xv*). By utilizing
biblical figures as well as famed secular figures found in the canons of literature, the
tales question the interpretation of women and their roles as commonly provided by
misogynous mainstream literature. The “truth” of the matter is never questioned, since
the Bible and other authoritative texts have already deemed these women worthy.

The resulting texts, the collections of lives and feats of admirable women,
defended the rights and dignities of all women by displaying the greatness of a few. As
was the case for the books belonging to the tradition of the speculum, these collections
were found, throughout time, to become more and more popular. The tradition
executed defenses of the female sex on collective rather than merely
individual grounds, further signaling their matrilineal awareness through
their catalogs of illustrious women. Interestingly enough, this
phenomenon of women defending their own kind in print arose for the
first time in England, France and Spain (to a lesser degree) alike during
the seventeenth century. (Merrim Early xxxviii)

As women began participating in this tradition, they amassed a pool of stories that
would serve as fodder for the next participant in the tradition.4 The matrilineal
tradition, therefore, multiplied itself as time passed.5 The implicit argument of these

4 For a dramatization of the theme of matrilineal literary lineage in the works of Sor Juana and
Anne Bradstreet, see Electa Arenal’s “This Life Within Me Won’t Keep Still” (Reinventing the Americas:
Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America; New York: Cambridge UP,
1986; 158-202).

5 For examples of texts belonging in this tradition see Marie de Romieu’s Brief discours, que
l’excellence de la femme surpasse celle de l’homme (Paris, 1591), Rachel Speght’s A Muzzle for
Melastomus and Certain Queries to the Baiter of Women (London, 1615), Constantia Munda’s The
Worming of a Mad Dogge (London, 1617), and Ester Sowernam’s Ester hath hang’d Haman (London,
1617). Studies of these texts include Léon Abensour’s Histoire générale du féminisme (Geneva: Slatkine
Reprints, 1979), Lula McDowell Richardson’s The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the
Renaissance (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929), Hinman Dow’s The Varying Attitude
toward Women in French Literature of the Fifteenth Century (New York: Institute of French Studies,
1936), and Ruth Kelso’s Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
1956).
texts lay in the assumption that if women were indeed capable of greatness, as men are, then the female sex is not inferior. In other words, where greatness is possible there is no possibility of inferior natures.

Sor Juana’s texts participate in an existing tradition which attempted to counter the mainstream tradition that derided women.6 The rhetoric that Sor Juana employs in her texts show that she was a participant in both rhetorical traditions of the baroque and of the querelle des femmes:

Formal aspects of the dialogue Sor Juana undertakes with the discourse of others (such as marginal and direct citations of classical authors, for the purpose of confirming or contradicting opinion, and parodic references to outmoded rhetoric) can be studied as a particularly skillful adaption of a common Baroque practice. How she re-reads, re-writes, revises, and disrupts conventions and the extent and substance of her discursive and dialogic practice are part of a long female tradition.

(Arenal Woman 131)

The participation of Sor Juana in the querelle des femmes was not done in ignorance. Due to Sor Juana’s mention of classical and renaissance writers, the tradition of exempla books was obviously known to her.

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6 Paz manages to view Sor Juana’s participation in this literary tradition in a psychoanalytical manner that places its emphasis on a strange Oedipal complex attributed to the nun. “In many of her writings,” notes a critic, “Sor Juana resuscitates Egyptian, Roman, and biblical female figures as embodying the positive qualities she would attribute to women. Paz gives special attention to those figures, notably the Egyptian Isis, whom he presents as telling literary projections of the nun herself. As Paz would have it, telescoped into the Neptuno alegórico’s figure of Isis—goddess of wisdom whose name means ‘dos veces varón’ [p. 232] (doubly man, p. 171) and who reconstructed the body of her dead husband, Osiris—is Sor Juana’s own psychic dilemma of the masculine and feminine as well as its resolution through literature as discussed earlier” (Merrim Toward 19). Though it is possible that Sor Juana’s participation in the tradition of the querelle des femmes may be in part driven by psychological needs, it is impossible to dismiss the nun’s extensive use of renowned feminine figures as Oedipal in nature. By constantly reminding her public that women were not intrinsically inferior to men and were also capable of greatness, the nun protected her right to write.
In the texts celebrating women renowned for virtue, Sor Juana reveres the exceptional souls that God gave to these women. These extraordinary spirits, in the bodies of women, manifested the many ways that women could achieve greatness. The likenesses between Sor Juana’s work and the works of Christine de Pizan makes it unlikely that the nun would not have had some knowledge of Pizan’s text. The two texts share not only a similarity in theme, the glorification of great women, but also utilize many of the same women as examples. Present in this emerging tradition is a strand of consistency among the many different participants. This can be seen when noted that many of the participants shared common goals in their writings. As one critic summarizes:

Sor Juana knew many texts by women that neither she nor others have ever mentioned. I find it likely, for example, that indirectly, if not directly, she was acquainted with the work of Christine de Pizan and of other figures of the querelle des femmes. In poems comparable to Sor Juana’s famous redondilla, “Hombres necios,” these European women attempted to subvert the same symbolic and social order that upholds double standards and surreptitious or flagrant, if foolish, misogyny. (Arenal Woman 131)

This literary tradition attempted to ridicule the misogynous tendencies of mainstream literature while attempting to create a place for women within the accepted traditions. It is important to note that the querelle des femmes, and related writings, are efforts to bestow upon women the right to participate in the existing literary and educational

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7 In the works of Chrysostom is also found a listing of women whose virtues made them rise above the limitations usually attributed to women. A list of women in Chrysostom who achieved spiritual equality with men—and, therefore, had manly spirit—is given on page 15 of Clark. According to Chrysostom, women who achieved manly spirit, or andreia, could “play the man,” or andrizontai.

traditions, not alternatives to those traditions. Both Sor Juana and Pizan rely on their classical, conventional educations to create a place for women within the intellectual realm.

**St. Catherine of Alexandria**

Sor Juana showed her deference for the matrilineal tradition by relying on figures such as Catherine of Alexandria. Although she was known for her extreme wisdom as well as virtue, Catherine’s knowledge was unsuccessfully challenged by the wise men of Alexandria, who, instead of convincing her to leave her religious beliefs, were converted by her to Christianity. Throughout her trial, Catherine showed her knowledge, granted to her by God himself, to be far superior to that of the pagan wise men. When she converted the wise men and refused to renounce Christianity, she was made to watch the execution of the wise men and then was herself tortured and martyred. Sor Juana, through her poems, portrays the condemnation of learnedness in women in general and the persecution of St. Catherine as parallel circumstances.

In a poem written for a public celebration of St. Catherine, Sor Juana’s views of the nature of feminine wisdom comes to the forefront. Of Catherine’s defeat of the Egyptian wise men, Sor Juana states clearly that her knowledge is divinely inspired and higher than the “arrogant” knowledge of the pagan wise men. Despite the fatal consequences of her victory, Sor Juana begins her poem in a chant reminiscent of one that would be used after a sporting event. The nun writes:

¡Victor, victor Catarina,  
que con su ciencia divina  
los sabios ha convencido,
y victoriosa ha salido
-con su ciencia soberana-
de la arrogancia profana
que a convencerla ha venido! (poem 317, 2:170, 1-7)

Victor, victor Catherine!
who with her divine science
the sages has convinced,
and victorious has escaped,
-with her sovereign science-
the profane arrogance
that to convince her came! (Tavard 31-32)

From the very beginning of the poem, it is obvious that Sor Juana decides to portray

Catherine both as a sage and as a conqueror. Catherine’s role as an active agent of God,
in this depiction, is not to be denied and is reminiscent of Sor Juana’s depiction of the

Virgin Mary. Catherine, the recipient of Holy Knowledge, is confronted by the
blasphemous arrogance of profane knowledge, and it is her role, as a representative of
God, to conquer the mundane.

The fact that Catherine is a woman allows for Sor Juana to elaborate on gender

issues and not just on the nature of divine knowledge and profane knowledge. Sor Juana
utilizes the figure of Catherine to prove, in one short statement, that the gender of the

body has no bearing on intellectual ability of the mind. She states that

De una Mujer se convencen
todos los Sabios de Egipto,
para prueba de que el sexo
no es esencia en lo entendido. (Cruz, poem 317, 2:171, 9-12)

By one Woman they were convinced,
all the sages of Egypt,
of the proof that sex
is no essence in the intellect. (Tavard 32)
The victory of Catherine over the wise ones of Egypt is portrayed as a dual feat. First, divinely inspired knowledge is greater than secular knowledge. Moreover, the intellect of a woman can rival, and surpass, the intellect of men. In the analysis of this poem it is stated that the triumph of Catherine proves that “‘Sex is no essence in the intellect.’ And God, who has so created humanity, intends women to serve the Church through the activity and creativity of their minds” (Tavard 32). Sor Juana utilizes the example of Catherine to make her point on the equality of women’s intellectual capacity and the religious necessity of allowing women to fulfill their capacities. Through St. Catherine, Sor Juana shows the futility and the heresy of muffling and questioning divinely inspired knowledge, as it is a gift from God regardless of the sex of the recipient.

Of course, Sor Juana goes further and states that it is not a miracle that a woman knows more than wise men. The true miracle, according to the nun, lies in that the wise men would admit that a woman knows more than they. Sor Juana states,

Prodigio fué, y aun milagro;  
pero no estuvo el prodigio  
en vencerlos, sino en que ellos se den por vencidos. (poem 317, 2:171, 14-17)

A victory, a miracle;  
though more prodigious than the feat  
of conquering, was surely that  
the men themselves declared defeat. (Peden Poems 189)

In the story of Catherine, the miracle lies in that men would ever admit to being bested by a woman. This “miracle,” as presented by Sor Juana, can be interpreted in a dual manner. It can be seen solely as a statement of the victory of divine knowledge over arrogant worldly knowledge where the acknowledgment by secular wisdom of the
superiority of religion and knowledge based on religious teachings is surprising if not miraculous. It can also be read as a satirical comment on the unlikelihood of men ever admitting that a woman is wiser. The men who are wise enough to understand Catherine's intellectual superiority and divine grace are converted to Christianity, die as martyrs for their beliefs, and in so doing, are granted eternal life; in Christian beliefs, they are bettered by being bested since they now die into greater glory. The enlightenment of these men comes about by listening to a woman's wisdom without prejudice. The King, however, though powerful, is not wise enough to understand that his knowledge is only arrogance and, hence, punishes all of the Christians involved; his fate is worsened through his proud blindness. Sor Juana presents Catherine and her intellect as the truest test of man's purported wisdom. The clear message is that it takes real wisdom to recognize and be humble in the face of higher wisdom, especially when it comes from a woman.

To some critics, this poem is autobiographical in nature and reads as a commentary on the nun's own situation. Though it may not be accurate to present the poem as autobiographical in nature, it is obvious that this poem participates in Sor Juana's contribution to the discussion of women and their intellectual abilities. The likeness between St. Catherine and Sor Juana has been noted by many of Sor Juana's critics and biographers. For example, Tavard does not even refer to Sor Juana's poetry

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There are other situations where critics liken the treatment of Catherine in Sor Juana's poetry and the nun's personal life. In the nun's treatment of Catherine, the equation that seems to be agreed upon by the critics that in the case of women "virtue + wisdom + beauty = social punishment." The connections between Sor Juana and St. Catherine are intensified by the critics to show the poetry of Sor Juana as autobiographical. For example, Kirk states that "In many respects the figure of Catherine of Alexandria, whose martyrdom is associated with the 'Catherine wheel,' was an obvious model for presentation of a
on St. Catherine when demarcating the likeness between the nun and the saint. He states that though Sor Juana in her *Respuesta* seems to agree with the Bishop of Puebla on some issues, “nothing even remotely hints that she also agreed with the restraints imposed on her sex: like St. Catherine, she had to be and to behave as God had created her” (Tavard 33). Though Sor Juana does not state the similarity between herself and Catherine clearly, she does weave an argument that leads to this conclusion. It is clear that it is part of the nun’s rhetoric to create a likeness between herself and the Saint without ever explicitly stating it.

In another poem written for a public celebration of St. Catherine, Sor Juana presents St. Catherine as a participant in a matrilineal tradition that includes the great women of the Old Testament. This tradition of great women, as defined by Sor Juana, is so potent that nature itself should be in awe in its presence. In this poem where Sor Juana delineates the participation of Catherine in light of the legacy of the women of the Old Testament, Sor Juana states that the Nile, one of Earth’s greatest rivers, should stop flowing after witnessing the greatness of St. Catherine. The poem proclaims that nature should be in deferral to feminine virtue. Sor Juana writes that “the waters are to stop in order to stare in amazement at Catherine, whose Gypsy beauty was augmented

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defense of the role of the intellectual woman in the church. Canonized, she was public and exemplary. Furthermore, she was the patron saint of philosophers, as well as of the University of Mexico, an institution which had, in the not too distant past, celebrated the man whose work Sor Juana had criticized, the Jesuit Antonio de Vieira. . . . Parallels with Sor Juana’s life—such as her virginity, her interest in liberal arts (poetry), as well as her precocious learning—are apparent” (Kirk 144). (Vieira is the Jesuit whose sermon Sor Juana criticized in her *Carta Atenagórica*.) By showing these connections, the critic attempts to portray the poet and the subject as intrinsically tied. Though some of the likenesses between St. Catherine and Sor Juana are obvious, it is difficult to assert that the similarities go any further than that of religious vocations and intellectual fame.
by virtues, surpassing those of twelve old testament heroines: Abigail, Esther, Rachel, Susanna, Deborah, Jael, Judith, Rebecca, Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Sara” (Kirk 145). This statement, showing that the virtue of Catherine is great, does not diminish the virtue of the other women. Indeed, what the poet actively does, is remind the reader that there are other great women in religious history and that Catherine, in her excelling state of virtue, is not an anomaly among women.

In this poem praising Catherine, Sor Juana addresses the river Nile and tells it to stop its flow to the sea out of fear that the ocean would envy the Nile for the greatness that it has been allowed to witness in the form of Catherine. She states:

Aguas puras del Nilo,
parad, parad,
y no le llevéis
el tributo al Mar,
pues el vuestras dichas
puede envidiar.
¡No, no, no corráis,
pues ya no podéis
aspirar a más! (Cruz, poem 312, 2:163, 1-9)

Pure waters of the Nile,
subside, subside,
do not carry the tribute
to the seagoing tide:
the sea might rob you
of the joys that abide.
No, no, flow no more—
you could not have desired
greater joy than these joys (Trueblood 137-139)

Sor Juana makes it clear, with these lines, that the Nile has reached the climax of its existence in witnessing the grandeur of Catherine. The claim that Catherine could be so magnificent as to be the defining moment in the existence of such a timeless and
important river, both historically as well as geographically, is supported by the comparison of Catherine to the great women of the Bible. In this poem, being the greatest of religious women is being great enough to have Nature stop in its tracks in deference.

The attributes of Catherine are then listed by the nun in comparison with the attributes of the great ladies of Biblical history. The greatness of Catherine, according to Sor Juana, is not limited to the fact that the saint existed within a tradition of learned and virtuous women, it is that she excels in that tradition. She states:

la que tu margen dora
Belleza, más lozana
que Abigail, Esther, Raquel, Susana.
   La hermosa Catarina,
   que la gloria Gitana
   vana, vana,
   elevó a ser Divina,
   y en las virtudes trueca
de Débora, Jael, Judith, Rebeca.
   No en frágil hermosura,
   que aprecia el loco abuso,
puso, puso
esperanza segura,
bien que excedió su cara
la de Ruth, Bethsabé, Thamar y Sara. (Cruz, poem 312, 2:164, 26-40)

who adorns your shore
with more bountiful manna
than Abigail, Esther, Rachel, Susannah.
Beautiful Catherine,
who made Egypt's glory,
so hollow before,
a Heavenly story,
whose virtues are hailed
by Deborah, Judith, Rebecca, and Jael.
She fastened no hopes
on fragile beauty,
much prized by the world
and still so futile,
yet of face she was fairer
than Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Sarah. (Trueblood 139)

Through this comparison between Catherine and great ladies of the Old Testament, Sor Juana, provides both the exultation of Catherine and a listing of great women. The enumeration makes it clear that the Christian faith did not evolve in the absence of female virtue. Through a brief listing, Sor Juana displays that there are many women of high esteem imbedded within, actively participating in the formation of the Faith. Through this concise catalog, it becomes clear that Catherine in her virtue is not alone among women; there are many women that in their sanctity and wisdom can serve as a comparison for Catherine.¹⁰

The comparison of Catherine and the great women of the Old Testament does not stop there, however. In a subsequent comparison with Judith, the acts of Catherine can be seen as acts of battle. By bringing to the forefront the ghastly act of Judith, of the brutal homicide she committed in order to protect the people of Israel, and equating it to Catherine’s death, Sor Juana portrays Catherine’s death as an equally assertive

¹⁰Some critics, however, see the naming of other great women in Biblical tradition as simply adding to the story surrounding Catherine. Tavard sees the enumeration of the ladies as simple glorification of St. Catherine. He states that “In fact, Juana improves on the legend. Not only is her heroine ‘the beautiful Catherine, / whom Gypsy glory, / vain, vain, / raised to be Divine.’ She also surpasses, in beauty, wisdom, and strength, all the great women of biblical history: Abigail, Esther, Rachel, Susanna, Deborah, Jael, Rebecca, Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Sarah” (Tavard 51). Though this is true, the listing does serve to glorify Catherine, it is better to not limit the interpretations possible since Sor Juana Inés was obviously not a simple writer and was capable of meaning many things at once. Her participation in the querelle des femmes alone justifies a reading of this poem as serving the function of creating an all-female environment for greatness.
choice and Catherine as an active agent in her own fate. Addressing the poem to Catherine, Sor Juana states:

Tu triunfo, mayor
fué que el de Judith:
que aquél fué matar,
y éste fué morir. (poem 313, 2:165, 37-40)

Your triumph was greater / than that of Judith: / that one was to kill, /
and this one was to die.

The emphasis is on agency as the poet compares Judith’s choice to kill to Catherine’s choice to die a martyr. Of both actions, Sor Juana opines, the greater one was Catherine’s. Judith, in her brave and violent act against the enemy forces, did not accomplish as much as Catherine, who dies for her reputation and her faith. In the echelon of actions that Sor Juana provides to the reader, the act of physically saving the Israelite people from destruction is not as great as the act of sacrificing one’s life for the Christian faith.

The active agency that Sor Juana bestows upon Catherine through this comparison allows for the death of Catherine to be seen not as a defeat, but as a victory against the forces of man and pagan. It is stated that as

in a comparison with the Old Testament, Catherine’s death is seen as a triumph greater than that of Judith, who beheaded the enemy commander Holofernes. Judith’s triumph was to kill, Catherine’s is to die. Sor Juana is careful to select an image of a martyr’s death which is not suffering imposed, but chosen. She emphasizes Catherine’s stance as a prudent, wise choice: “You knew” she writes, “how to acquire eternal life through a brief death” (O.C. 2:166). (Kirk 145)

In this view of Catherine’s death, St. Catherine is portrayed as a strong and brave martyr and not as a sacrificial lamb. Sor Juana clarifies that Catherine chose a difficult
path knowingly and that Catherine struggled and persevered until she completed her goal successfully. Catherine’s death, therefore, is far from a defeat for it is in fact an absolute victory.

This point is further emphasized in a poem which compares St. Catherine to Cleopatra.\textsuperscript{11} Though Sor Juana initially states that Cleopatra dies for human love (as compared to Catherine who dies for a higher love), in a second stage of the poem the concept evolves into one of agency and self-determination. By the end of the poem, Cleopatra’s motivation for killing herself moves away from the love of Marc Anthony to one political in nature. The two women are then linked by a purity of motivation: both die in order to maintain their reputations in the face of history as well as their self-agency. Cleopatra refuses to be a slave to Augustus Caesar while Catherine refuses to be enslaved by ignorance through the denial of her Christian beliefs. The poem by Sor Juana clearly depicts Cleopatra’s conscious choice to die in order to avoid shame as parallel to the choice that St. Catherine makes.\textsuperscript{12} The nun writes:

\begin{quote}
Porque no triunfase Augusto \\
de su beldad soberana, \\
se mata Cleopatra, y precia \\
más que su vida la fama; \\
que muerte más prolija
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} According to Tavard, Sor Juana makes Catherine serve as a foil to the other Egyptian beauty, Cleopatra. He states that in this poem, “Catherine is the counterpoint to Cleopatra. The two glories of Egypt belong together in their differences” (Tavard 51). In Tavard’s perception, the religious differences between the two women separates them irrevocably.

\textsuperscript{12} As a critic aptly notes, the movement away from love as a motivation for suicide leads into the realm of political defiance. It is stated that in the poem, “Cleopatra’s motivation for dying is transformed from that of a despairing lover to one of political resistance. She places the poisonous snake on her breast so as not to have Augustus triumph over her ‘sovereign beauty.’ She valued her fame (honor) more than her life, and sought death through the poisonous snake rather than suffer ‘the prolonged death of slavery’ (OC 2:167)” (Kirk 145-6).
es ser esclava.
Así Catarina heroica
la ebúrne entregargarganta
al filo, porque el Infierno
no triunfe de su constancia;
y así, muriendo, triunfa
de quien la mata.
Infamia en Cleopatra, o muerte,
la dulce vida amenazan;
pero ella elige, por menos
mal, la muerte, que la infamia:
porque más que la vida
el honor ama. (poem 314, 2:167, 29-46)

So that Augustus could not triumph / over her sovereign beauty, /
Cleopatra kills herself, esteeming / more than her life, her fame; /
because a more extended death / is slavery. / In that way, Catherine
heroically / relinquishes her ivory throat / to the blade, so that Hell / does
not triumph over her constancy; / and, in this way, dying, she triumphs /
over her executer. / Infamy of Cleopatra, or death, / both threaten her
sweet life; / but she chooses, as the lesser evil, / death over infamy: /
because more than life, / she loves honor.

In this poem, Juana Inés chooses to portray these two women as sharing the
determination to live their lives according to their own beliefs and not to fall under the
power of those poised to conquer. Catherine, fighting a battle within the religious
realm, is not different, in this view, from thelegendarily lusty Cleopatra. Sor Juana
utilizes the legacy that both women have: the constancy to choose death over a life they
do not desire. Through this comparison, it is difficult to see the act of Catherine as a
compliant act, despite the meekness attributed to women within the religious
construction. First through the comparison to Judith, and presently in this comparison to
Cleopatra, Catherine's sacrifice is portrayed as an act of political rebellion against the
powers that be.
St. Catherine, however, is not the only woman that Sor Juana uses as a model to construct an intellectual space for herself. As displayed in the poem delineating Catherine's virtues, Sor Juana knew of many Biblical women of renown. In her Respuesta, Sor Juana clearly states that intellectual pursuits are a natural inclination in her and that she really does not have to rely on books for her inspiration. However, Sor Juana states that in the books that she had read, she received a great deal of encouragement from the figures of prominent women. The examples that these legendary women have set, through the sacred texts the nun studied, demonstrated to the poet the inherent intellectual ability of women. With this rhetoric, Sor Juana begins a delineation that allows her the right to learn and write. She states:

Confieso también que con ser esto verdad tal que, como he dicho, no necesitaba de ejemplares, con todo no me han dejado de ayudar los muchos que he leído, así en divinas como en humanas letras. Porque veo a una Débora dando leyes, así en lo militar como en lo político, y gobernando el pueblo donde había tantos varones doctos. Veo una sapientísima reina de Sabá, tan docta . . . (Cruz Respuesta 4:460)

I confess, too, that though it is true, as I have stated, that I had no need of books, it is nonetheless also true that they have been no little inspiration, in divine as in human letters. Because I find a Deborah administering the law, both military and political, and governing a people among whom there were many learned men. I find a most wise Queen of Saba, so learned . . . (Peden Poems 45)

These women, who are all exemplary according to the Bible, the most holy and unquestionable of books, are all portrayed as being gifted in areas usually ascribed as masculine in nature. The role of these women in the Bible, as not only outstanding but also as integral to the faith, allows Sor Juana to create an argument for the importance of the intellectual activity of women in society. By creating for herself a context of
virtuous and wise women, the nun could argue that she also deserved the right and the room to live her life according to her God-given talents. “This company,” of holy and wise women, “assured her that, despite the odds, she had a right to move in the world as she did, to follow her own bent” (Arenal Convent 177-78). Sor Juana applied this argument to both the right to education of women in general as well as her personal, individual right to lead an intellectual life.

**Mujeres Sabias**

To show that women were essential in the creation of civilization and culture, Sor Juana relies on the many women of distinction in the secular realm. In the *Respuesta*, Sor Juana lists many pagan women known for their wisdom and their donations to society. These exemplary females in addition to those women found in the sacred texts prove, according to the nun, that women have a proven track record of positive contributions to society. According to Sor Juana, women are not just capable of divinely inspired knowledge, the women that Sor Juana lists are also capable of secular virtue. In including the virtuous pagan women in her listings, Sor Juana seems to argue that women are as intrinsically capable of virtue and courage as men without divine aid. She states: “Si revuelvo a los gentiles, lo primero que encuentro es con las Sibilas,

13 Another feminine figure of knowledge, previously studied in great detail by other critics including Paz and Kirk, Isis serves the nun as an exemplary woman. Sor Juana’s *Neptuno alegórico*, written on the behest of the state in celebration of the viceroy to the colony, contains a discussion of Isis in which the goddess is representative of feminine knowledge. One of her first major works, in it the entering Viceroy is depicted as Neptune while Isis, his mother, plays a very important role. It is stated that the poem presents a view where “if wisdom is the source of good government, the source of wisdom is feminine. Neptune is dependent on, one could almost say, the creature of a woman: the goddess Isis. As Neptune’s mother she would have impressed him with the value of wisdom (OC 4:363.364). Considering that Sor Juana’s discussion of the origins and interrelationships of Isis and other goddesses associated with wisdom continues in different variations for over two hundred lines, *Allegorical Neptune* provides early evidence of Sor Juana’s feminist concerns” (Kirk 31).
elegidas de Dios para profetiza los principales misterios de nuestra Fe . . . Veo adorar por diosa de las ciencias a una mujer como Minerva, hija del primer Júpiter y maestra de toda la sabiduría de Atenas. . . .” (Cruz Respuesta 4:461) ‘If I again turn to the Gentiles, the first I encounter are the Sibyls, those women chosen by God to prophesy the principal mysteries of our Faith . . . I see adored as a goddess of the sciences a woman like Minerva, the daughter of the first Jupiter and mistress over all the wisdom of Athens . . .’ (Peden Poems 45). In this listing, Juana Inés is careful to begin with the Sibyls, the pagan prophets who were praised for having the power to foresee the advent of Christianity. By listing the Sibyls first, Sor Juana implies that the most important type of knowledge is that which points to the ultimate Truth, otherwise known as Christianity. Having first mentioned those women found in Catholic tradition, then those women who were able to envision the coming of Christ, Sor Juana sets up a rhetoric which clearly places the Catholic Faith at the apex of importance. After protecting herself from accusations of heretical notions through this rhetoric, the poet is safe to mention such pagan greats as Athena. Even then, however, Sor Juana is sure to mention that Athena is a mortal of such virtue and wisdom that she is mistaken for a goddess. The nun is careful not to diminish Athena’s importance by clarifying that her divine nature is assumed due to the massive aid that she provided to humanity. Once again, Sor Juana depicts women to be capable of incredible wisdom to the benefit of society.

Sor Juana, in her endeavor to show the equality of women in the intellectual realm, like many other women writers participating in the querelle des femmes, argues
that women were not only capable of learning these arts, but indeed, may have been the ones that created them. As a critic states: “Pizan, in The Book of the City of Ladies, like Sor Juana in many works including El sueño, constructs ‘a compelling case for the female origins of culture and civilization’” (Arenal Woman 131). In order to make her case for intellectual equality, Sor Juana, like many other writers in this genre, includes a listing of women who are mythically responsible for the creation of civilization. The importance of educating women and recognizing their intellectual capacity is then elevated since women have played, and, implicitly, can continue to play, a vital part in the formation of human knowledge.

In the Respuesta, Sor Juana continues her listing of great pagan women who, because of their intellectual greatness, were said to have a divine nature. She states: “A una Nicostrata, inventora de las letras latinas y eruditasima en las griegas . . . Aspasia Milesia . . . maestra de Pericles . . . y en fin a toda la gran turba de las que merecieron nombres, ya de griegas, ya de musas, ya de pitonisas; pues todas no fueron veneradas de la antigüedad por tales” (Cruz Respuesta 4:461) ‘A Nicostrata, framer of Latin verses and most erudite in Greek. . . . Aspasia of Miletus, . . . teacher of the philosopher Pericles . . . and, finally, a great throng of women deserving to be named, some as Greeks, some as muses, some as seers; for all were nothing more than learned women, held, and celebrated—and venerated as well—as such by antiquity’ (Peden Poems 45-47). This translation, which states that Nicostrata is the “framer of Latin verses,” is possibly limiting. The original, which states that Nicostrata is “inventora de letras latinas,” or
“inventor of Latin letters,” is in line with the rendition of Nicostrata given by Christine de Pizan. Pizan states of Nicostrata that

in order to show forth her wisdom and the excellence of her mind to the centuries to come, she worked and studied so hard that she invented her own letters, which were completely different from those of other nations, that is, she established the Latin alphabet and syntax, spelling, the difference between vowels and consonants, as well as a complete introduction to the science of grammar. (Pizan 72)

Clearly, Nicostrata, in this representation, supported the view that women, indeed, help lay the foundations for culture and civilization. Women, as it is made clear through a listing of well known, admired examples, have played a fundamental role in the making of Western civilization. Through Athena and Nicostrata, women are portrayed as having created the sciences that have made the progress and comfort of human societies possible. Other women, though not held to be as directly impacting to society, still made their influence felt through indirect roles, like Aspasia of Miletus who educated a great man of history. Other women are recognized by history through the classification of muses and seers, again, so sage they are assumed to be supernatural. These great women, Sor Juana maintains, are not divine in nature, they are just educated. This is an important part of her rhetoric as it is in the nun’s best interest to prove that woman, without any divine attributes, is capable of learning and teaching to the benefit of society. It is Sor Juana’s task to show that a woman, like herself, can lead an intellectual life and, for the further advancement of society, should be allowed to do so.

Juana Inés’s use of the tradition of mujeres sabias in order to justify her own intellectual desires has not passed unperceived. As it is stated:
La representación de la sabiduría en un personaje femenino, no ha pasado desapercibido por la crítica . . . y forma parte de uno de los argumentos que Sor Juana utilizó con insistencia en su defensa del derecho de la mujer al estudio: la existencia de personajes femeninos ejemplares, las «mujeres sabias», recordadas en la Respuesta, desde los personajes mitológicos como Minerva hasta las religiosas que, a través de los siglos, habían destacado por su actividad intelectual, o aquellos ejemplos más cercanos a ella misma de los que tuvo conocimiento.

(Gonzáles Boixo 77).

The representation of knowledge in a feminine persona has not passed unnoticed by the criticism . . . and forms part of the argument that Sor Juana consistently utilized in her defense of the right for women to study the existence of exemplary female personages, the “wise women,” remembered in the Respuesta. From the mythical characters, like Minerva, to the religious characters that through the centuries had stood out due to their intellectual abilities, or those examples she knew of that were nearer to her.

The frequency with which Juana Inés alludes to the matrilineal tradition of knowledge, coupled with the clear statements defending the right for women to study such as found in the Respuesta, make it possible to assert that Sor Juana attempted to craft a rhetoric that would insist, without leaving the realms of proper decorum, that women had a right to receive equal intellectual treatment.

Sor Juana, despite her claim against the social practices of the day and the challenge that she presented to the status quo, was never questioned by the Inquisition. Once again, it becomes important to note that the nun never crossed the limitations of the existing literary, theological, and social traditions. The catalogue of impressive women that Sor Juana relied upon was not just limited to the aforementioned great women of antiquity. In a politically astute move, in her list of mujeres sabias, Sor Juana listed St. Paula. St. Paula, a close friend of St. Jerome, served as patron mother in the
Hieronymite convent in which the nun resided. Sor Juana did not need to go any further than the Saint under whose protection she served the Catholic Church to enlist the aid of a woman renowned for her wisdom. She states: “Y para no buscar ejemplos fuera de casa, veo una santisima madre mia, Paula, docta en las lenguas hebreá, griega y latina y aptisima para interpretar las Escrituras” (Cruz Respuesta 4:461) ‘And not to overlook examples close to home, I see my most holy mother Paula, learned in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and most able in interpreting the Scriptures’ (Peden Poems 47). The example, as a nun, that Sor Juana is supposed to be following, that of St. Paula, is one that vindicates her intellectual ambition.

Sor Juana compiled an army of wise women in order to fight her battle for intellectual equality. By doing this, Sor Juana, participating in the querelle des femmes, writes texts that are neither complacent with traditional practice nor rebellious against literary traditions. The fact that all the women that Sor Juana enlists are gleaned from the accepted texts of a classical education, makes this point clearer. Arenal states that,

The most important source of support for her defense was one she herself had marshaled to her side in the course of a lifetime of reading: a long line of “tantas y tan insignes mujeres” (IV, 460-61; p. 93) (learned and powerful women of the past). For she buttresses her self-defense with more than forty-two examples of her female predecessors—names drawn from classical, mythological, biblical, and contemporary sources. (Convent 177)

By garnering the image of a wise woman from the texts accepted to be authoritative and fundamental to civilization, Sor Juana questions the reading comprehension of those

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14 It is of poetic importance to note that in the literal Spanish, Sor Juana creates a play on words by stating that to find an example of a mujer sabia she needs not look “outside of [her] home” (“fuera de casa”) since she lived in a convent dedicated to St. Paula.
who held that women should not be allowed an education. The female army that Sor Juana created\textsuperscript{15} was equipped with the reputation of both wisdom and virtue.

Another important point made by the poet through the creation of listings of \textit{mujeres sabias}, outside of proving her argument of woman’s intellectual ability through example, is to show that in the past, women had been allowed intellectual freedoms with great benefit to the community. The naming of great women provides the “evidence of an alternative tradition of learned women of which she is a part” (Kirk 135). This evidence is “taken by Sor Juana as proof that ‘authoritative tradition’ of the hierarchical church has sanctioned, even celebrated women of learning” (Kirk 135). This alternative tradition provides a favorable context for Sor Juana’s claims of intellectual equality. The fact that the stories and the praise of these women are to be found in the Bible and in classical texts proves that women’s ability, by definition, has a place within both the religious and the secular intellectual realms.

St. Paul’s statement ordering women to be silent seems to be the statement most used to try to enforce a limitation of women’s education in Sor Juana’s time. Addressing this oft-quoted statement, Sor Juana is always careful to never appear as contradicting the decree of St. Paul. Sor Juana, however, does take the liberty of discrediting the misogynous interpretation of the statement by utilizing the alternative,

\textsuperscript{15} A partial listing of the women that Sor Juana mentions includes “the mother of John the Baptist, Saint Paula, Saint Teresa, Deborah, the Queen of Sheba, Abigail, Esther, Rahab, Anna, the Sibyls, Minerva, Argentaria, [daughter of] Tiresias, Zenobia, Arete, Nicostrata, Aspasia Milesia, Hispania, Leonia, Jucia, Corina, Cornelia, Catherine, Gertrude, Paula Blesia, Eustoquio, Fabiola, Falconia, Queen Isabel, Christine Alexandra, the Duchess of Aveyro, the Countess of Villaumbrosa, Marcela, Pacatula, Leta, Bridgette, Salome, Mary the mother of Jacob, Sister Mary of Antigua, and Mary of Agreda. \textit{O.C.}, IV, 460 et passim; Rivers ed., p. 93” (Arenal Convent footnote 34, 177-78).
yet accepted, tradition of *mujeres sabias* as its context. She, in her *Respuesta*, states that the understanding of the statement by St. Paul, *Mulieres in Ecclesia taceant*, is of vital importance to the topic at hand. If, she states, that phrase is to be understood as banning women solely from speaking in church:

(. . . que es, en mi sentir, su verdadero sentido, pues vemos que, con efecto, no se permite en la Iglesia que las mujeres lean públicamente ni prediquen), ¿por qué reprenden a las que privadamente estudian? Y si lo entienden de lo segundo y quieren que la prohibición del Apóstol se trascendentalmente, que ni en lo secreto se permita escribir ni estudiar a las mujeres, ¿cómo vemos que la Iglesia ha permitido que escriba una Gertrudis, una Teresa, una Brigida, la monja de Agreda16 y otras muchas? Y si me dicen que éstas eran santas, es verdad, pero no obsta a mi argumento; lo primero, porque la proposición de San Pablo es absoluta y comprende a todas las mujeres sin excepción de santas . . . (Cruz *Respuesta* 4:467)

. . . which, in my opinion, is its true interpretation, then we see that if in fact it is not permitted of women to read publicly in church, nor preach, why do they censure those who study privately? And if they understand the latter, and wish that the prohibition of the Apostle be applied transcendentally—that not even in private are women to be permitted to write or study—how are we to view the fact that the Church permitted a Gertrude, a Santa Teresa, a Saint Birgitta, the Nun of Agreda, and so many others, to write? And if they say to me that these women were saints, they speak the truth; but this poses no obstacle to my argument. First, because Saint Paul’s proposition is absolute, and encompasses all women not excepting saints . . . (Peden *Poems* 59)

By placing the alternative tradition of wise women in direct conflict with the popular interpretation of St. Paul’s statement, Sor Juana creates a quandary for those who wished to uphold both the sanctity of the ordained female saints (which, especially in the time of the Inquisition, is of grave importance) and the prohibition of learning for

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16 At the time Sor Juana wrote, the Nun of Agreda was far from a saint. She was the spiritual advisor to the king and a major resource for Sor Juana’s Marianism. Because of this, the nun may have felt it necessary to deign her an authority.
women. In this manner, Sor Juana shows that St. Paul’s statement had been obviously misinterpreted, for the Catholic Church had never, in action, ordained ignorance for women: indeed, they often had recognized the holy nature of women’s wisdom. Sor Juana goes further than to imply that the tradition of learned women is tolerated by the Catholic Church, however: her argument culminates in stating that the denial of education to women is contrary to the teachings of the Bible and the Holy Church. In her *Respuesta*, the nun quotes St. Jerome instructing a mother to educate her daughter in the Biblical tradition and promptly asks: “Pues si así quería el Santo que se educase una niña que apenas empezaba a hablar, ¿qué querrá en sus monjas y en sus hijas espirituales?” (Cruz 4:464) ‘And if this Saint desired that a young girl scarcely beginning to talk be educated in this fashion, what would he desire for his nuns and his spiritual daughters?’ (Peden *Poems* 53). The quotation of St. Jerome allows the nun to argue that the most holy of Church Fathers, in whose convent she is residing, sees the education of women as a necessary part of their spiritual growth.

The poet expands this statement by wondering what the Saint would have desired for those women entering into a life of religious devotion. In so doing, Juana Inés shifts the question of orthodoxy away from her intellectual pursuits and toward her would-be-censors and the critics of female education. Sor Juana, however, does not stop there. Kirk notes:

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17 For a discussion on when and where a women should be silent and the reading of the Bible passage, and how Sor Juana read that passage, the reader should turn to Kirk p. 137. Apparently, as Kirk puts it, Sor Juana bases her interpretation of that passage on Eusebius’s *Church History*.

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After having shown that both the Bible (St. Paul) and the biblical scholar of the Church, Jerome (his translation had been “canonized” after the Council of Trent), support not just women learning—as Philotea/Bishop Santa Cruz will admit—but also that women teach, the nun can argue that the lack of appropriate higher education for women of her own society goes against the accepted tradition of the Church. (Kirk 135)

After providing the many examples of learned women in order to assert that there had always existed an alternative tradition, Sor Juana then portrays this alternative tradition as an integral and accepted part of the Catholic Western tradition. It is Sor Juana’s argument that the right for women to be educated and to pursue intellectual interests was decreed in accordance with tradition, not against it.

It is a simple question that Sor Juana poses: “como conclusión de ese largo desfile, Sor Juana parece preguntarse y preguntar que, si hubo mujeres eruditas en el pasado, ¿por qué es un delito que las hay hoy?” (Guernelli 68) ‘as a conclusion to that long delineation, Sor Juana seems to ask herself and ask others: it there were learned women in the past, why is it a crime that they exist today?’ The listing of the mujeres sabias makes it impossible to refute that there were indeed women of renowned wisdom. The question stands: is it wrong for there to be wise women during her day?

Women of Courage

Sor Juana did more than just rely on the mujeres sabias of Western tradition; she also relied on the classical figures of women as virtue, like the Roman Lucretia. Lucretia who, according to legend committed suicide after being raped by the Roman Prince Tarquin, is one of the many pagan subjects of Sor Juana. According to Christine de Pizan in The Book of the City of Ladies, Lucretia’s final words were: “This is how I
absolve myself of sin and show my innocence. . . . From now on no woman will ever live shamed and disgraced by Lucretia’s example” (Pizan 162). Juana Inés, in a poem addressed to Lucretia, shares the view that Lucretia’s suicide was meant to preserve the honor and pride of the wronged woman. Sor Juana states that Lucretia, through her suicide, ended the many ills that plagued her. However, Sor Juana sees the mode of death as questionable. She states:

Pero si el modo de tu fin violento
puedes borrar del tiempo y sus anales,
quita la punta del puñal sangriento
con que pusiste fin a tantos males;
que es mengua de tu honrado sentimiento
decir que te ayudaste de puñales. (Cruz, poem 153, 1:281, 9-14)

But if the manner of your violent end / you can erase from time and its annals / take away the tip of the bloody dagger / with which you ended so many ills; / it belittles your honorable emotion / to say that you aided yourself by stabs.

Sor Juana is careful to make sure to make clear that the suicide of Lucretia is incorrect since suicide is considered a sin in the Catholic Faith. It is of interest to note that Sor Juana, while stating that suicide belittles the proud sentiment, “es mengua de tu honrado sentimiento”, she proceeds to state that the prize of honor is one which merits such sacrifice. Sor Juana celebrates Lucretia’s choice of taking her own life in order to protect her reputation, while maintaining that the choice itself (suicide) is wrong and even dishonest. Sor Juana writes “¡Oh providencia de Deidad suprema! / ¡Tu honestidad motiva tu deshonra, / y tu deshonra te eterniza honrada!” (poem 154, 1:282, 12-14) ‘Oh providence of the supreme Deity! / Your honesty inspires your dishonor, / and your dishonor eternalizes your honesty!’. Paradoxically, it is the sin of suicide
which keeps Lucretia, throughout history, as the example of a virtuous woman. Virtue, in the case of Lucretia as presented by Sor Juana Inés, is found in the face of religious aberration: it is found in a pagan who goes against the most Catholic of teachings.\textsuperscript{18} Lucretia, therefore, serves as evidence that a woman is capable of virtue even when going against Catholic teachings. Consequently, women, like men, are capable of being virtuous without divine motivations.

Another of the historical figures that Sor Juana utilizes to portray feminine secular virtue is Julia, the wife of Pompey and the daughter of Julius Caesar. Sor Juana uses the story of Julia that Christine de Pizan relates in The Book of the City of Ladies. According to Pizan, Julia died suddenly, while far along in pregnancy, because she falsely believed that Pompey had been killed. According to Pizan, the death of Julia and her unborn child robbed Rome of the opportunity for Pompey and Caesar to live in peace with each other, and so threw the empire into a civil war (Pizan 128). The nun bolsters the opinion that the fate of Rome was secured to the fate of Julia in a poem dedicated to Julia. The nun aligns the fate of the great Roman Empire with that of the sensitive and loyal Julia while strongly emphasizing the great capacity of Julia to feel love for her husband. She states:

\begin{verbatim}
Rinde la vida en que el sosiego estriba
de esposo y padre, y con mortal congoja
la concebida sucesión arroja,
y de la paz con ella a Roma priva.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{18} The glorification of Lucretia did not follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. Speaking of St. Augustine, a critic states that the Church Father believed that: "the Romans who glorified Lucretia for not living with the shame of rape were more interested in human pride than divine mercy (1.22-25). Her crime was worse than Tarquin's: "He took her body, she took her life. He raped, she murdered." (1.19)" (Wills 115). Sor Juana would have been aware of this.
Si el infeliz concepto que tenia
en las entrañas Julia, no abortara,
al muerte de Pompeyo excusaría:
¡Oh tirana fortuna, quién pensara
que con el mismo amor que la temía,
con ese mismo amor se la causara! (Cruz, poem 155, 1:282, 5-14)

She gives up her life, which supports peace / between husband and
father, and with mortal anguish / she throws the conceived succession, /
and with it, deprives Rome of peace. / If the unhappy notion that she had
/ in her bowels had not caused Julia to abort, / the death of Pompey
would be excused: / Oh, tyrannical fortune, who would think / that with
the same love with which she feared it [the death of Pompey], / with that
same love she would be the cause of it!

The incredible love that Julia had for Pompey made Julia’s grief so great when she
thought Pompey dead, that it killed her. This great love, which made her husband’s
death the most fearful thing possible, caused the death of Pompey since it killed Julia
and the child she was carrying. The child, whose birth would guarantee the preservation
of power over the Roman Empire in both the lineage of Pompey and Caesar, is
presented by Juana Inés and Pizan as the child which would make a war between
Caesar and Pompey unnecessary. Clearly, through this example, Sor Juana portrays the
love of a woman as a force that can decide the fate of empires. The public importance
of Julia, as a force for political and military peace, is seen as a corollary to her capacity
to feel unselfish love.

Another classical figure, Brutus’s wife, Portia, serves as an illustration of the
loyalty and faithfulness that women can provide. According to Pizan, after hearing of
Brutus’s defeat and his death, she “abjured both joy and life” (Pizan 135). Under heavy
surveillance, “all knives or anything sharp with which she could kill herself had been
taken from her, for it was obvious what she wanted to do, she went to the fire, took burning coals, swallowed them, and burned herself to death” (Pizan 135). The faithfulness and loyalty of Portia, as noted through her determination to commit suicide and not live without Brutus, is not to be controlled by those desiring to keep her alive. Both Sor Juana and Pizan portray in vivid detail the determination with which Portia carried out her plans. Her loyalty to her husband Brutus, who is renowned for his betrayal, is seen as a willful and cunning act of self-determination. Sor Juana, in a poem addressed to Portia, wonders about the level of passion that led to such an atrocious act as was her suicide. She states:

¿Qué pasión, Porcia, qué dolor tan ciego
te obliga a ser de ti fiera homicida?
¿O en qué ofende tu inocente vida,
que así le das batalla, a sangre y fuego? (Cruz, poem 156, 1:282, 1-4)

What passion, Portia, what pain so blind / obliges you to be your own fierce assassin? / Oh, in what does your innocent life offend / that you fight it in this way, with blood and fire?

The willfulness of Portia is seen as a marvel and the strength of her fight to determine her own fate is celebrated. Portia’s love for Brutus, and her decision to share his defeat, are interpreted as the utmost signs of loyalty and faithfulness.

Once again, Sor Juana notes the vile nature of suicide while writing in admiration of the self-determination Portia displays. The baseness of her death, as well as the heinous fashion in which it was enacted, does not question the purity of the love that motivates it. Sor Juana continues to state in her poem that

porque si bien de tu pasión se infiere,
mal morirá a las brasas materiales
quien a las llamas del amor no muere. (poem 156, 1:283, 12-14)

because from your passion it can be inferred, / one will die badly in the face of material coals / who in the face of the flames of love does not die.

Portia’s physical death, as presented by Sor Juana, does not take away from the undying character of her love. The ceasing to exist in the physical realm in no way diminishes the legendary status of Portia as an exemplary of the amount of virtue and loyalty that a woman can attain.

**Hombres Necios**

In harmony with the tradition of the *querelle des femmes*, Sor Juana does more than present an alternative tradition of learned women. “In addition to constructing an alternative tradition of learned women,” states Kirk, “Sor Juana reveals the negative aspects of the male tradition” (134). Alongside presenting the many types of wise and virtuous women that constitute the nun’s defense of the virtue and intellectual capacity of women, Sor Juana presents the flaws of men through a listing of men who have gone against the teachings of the Catholic Church. The nun utilizes this list of disgraceful men in order to prove that men are not always adept in intellectual activities and, through a misinformed education, can cause much detriment to society. Juana Inés classifies the human population and their right to an education according to the individual’s intellectual ability, and not to their gender.19 Juana Inés attempts to place

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19 Of herself, in the context of the *Respuesta*, Sor Juana states that her intellectual limitations are due to the limitations of her own abilities and not due to her gender. She states that “she, herself, no matter how much she studied could never know as much as Aristotle or St. Augustine because she is not endowed as they” (Kirk 135).
men and women on equal intellectual standing by decreeing that some men, like some
women, are divinely gifted enough to learn and teach, while others are simply
unworthy. By giving examples of men that taught heresies, obviously not having the
intellectual capacity to fully comprehend the message being given, Sor Juana portrays
men and the education of men as a greater danger to society than women and the
education of women could ever be.

Should the reason that women were kept from being educated be the fear that
their flawed natures would misconstrue and pervert the Truths being taught to them,
Sor Juana presents as evidence the many men who managed to do the same with serious
consequences to society. In a tone reminiscent of that found in *Hombres necios*, Sor
Juana accuses men of arrogantly believing themselves to be wise just because they are
men. Accompanying the statement that women are held to be inept just because they
are women, and following Sor Juana’s repeated presentation of the tradition of *mujeres
sabias*, Sor Juana disproves the male-female binary of intellectual capacity and virtue.
She provides proof of the matter in her *Respuesta* where she states:

Y esto es tan justo que no sólo a las mujeres, que por tan ineptas están
tenidas, sino a los hombres, que con sólo serlo piensan que son sabios, se
había de prohibir la interpretación de las Sagradas Letras, en no siendo
muy doctos y virtuosos y de ingenios dóciles y bien inclinados; porque
de lo contrario creo yo que han salido tantos sectarios y que ha sido la
raíz de tantas herejías; porque hay muchos que estudian para ignorar,
especialmente los que son de ánimos arrogantes, inquietos y soberbios, .
. . Y añado yo que le perfecciona (si es perfección la necedad) el haber
estudiado su poco de filosofía y teología y el tener alguna noticia de
lenguas, que con eso es necio en muchas ciencias y lenguas: porque un
necio grande no cabe en sólo la lengua materna. (Cruz 4:462-3)
This view is indeed just, so much so that not only women, who are held to be so inept, but also men, who merely for being men believe they are wise, should be prohibited from interpreting the Sacred Word if they are not learned and virtuous and of gentle and well-inclined natures; that this is not so has been, I believe, at the root of so much sectarianism and so many heresies. For there are many who study but are ignorant, especially those who are in spirit arrogant, troubled, and proud . . . And I would add that a fool may reach perfection (if ignorance may tolerate perfection) by having studied his title of philosophy and theology and by having some learning of tongues, by which he may be a fool in many sciences and languages: a great fool cannot be contained solely in his mother tongue. (Peden Poems 49)

Echoing the adage “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing,” Juana Inés questions the system of education which will provide the necessary tools for an ignorant man to damage society (through the creation of a sect) while denying a wise woman a simple education.

The social liberty that men have, to teach, to govern, and to organize, further adds to the dangerous aspect of ignorant men. Men, she implies, should be more closely limited in their education due to the increased social impact that they wield. Those men, too arrogant or too obtuse in nature, she states, should be restricted in their learning:

A estos, vuelvo a decir, hace dano el estudiar, porque es poner espada en manos del furioso . . . a los cuales hizo dano la sabiduria porque, aunque es el mejor alimento y vida del alma, a la manera que en el estómago mal acompleccionado y de viciado calor, mientras mejores los alimentos que recibe, mas áridos fermentados y perversos son los humores que cria, asi los malévolos, mientras más estudian, peores opiniones engendran . . . (Cruz Respuesta 4:463)

For such as these, I reiterate, study is harmful, because it is as if to place a sword in the hands of a madman . . . To these men, wisdom was harmful, although it is the greatest nourishment and the life of the soul; in the same way that in a stomach of sickly constitution and adulterated
complexion, the finer the nourishment it receives, the more arid, fermented, and perverse are the humors it produces; thus these evil men: the more they study, the worse opinions they engender . . . (Peden Poems 51)

Likening the mind to the stomach, the nun states that there are some personalities which simply do not have the capacity to process knowledge to the benefit of themselves or others. It is these people, those with perverse humors, who need to be restricted of their right to write and publish. Women, though they can also be of errant opinions, should not be restricted solely because of their genders.

Sor Juana’s argument reverts back to the biological plane, stating that it is the body that determines whether a person is fit to be educated. However, in her biological argument, it is not the sex of an individual that should determine whether or not they are educated, it is the makeup of the brain. The nun argues that the soul of male and female are equally tied to the body but not in the way that it is widely assumed. Sor Juana does not argue that all females should be educated, as she argues that, like men, they should have the opportunity to be educated should they be worthy of it. The measure of worth is the inherent nature: those of “arrogant, troubled, and proud” spirits are not fit to be educated.

Through the figures of Catherine, the great ladies of the Old Testament, and the exemplary figures of the classical world, the nun participates in the querelle des femmes. Echoing the works of others, like Christine de Pizan, Sor Juana argues for the recognition of the virtue of women. By showing women as being capable of incredible feats that aid humanity, the participants in the querelle des femmes are arguing that
women are capable beings in all roles of society. By arguing that men are capable of stupendities and of damaging society through arrogance, Sor Juana creates a range of action equal for men and women.
Conclusion

There is a growing interest in Sor Juana and her works. In the growing critical attention, the author, enigmatic and mysterious, is the recipient of as much attention as her works. A critic notes:

As time passes the appeal of the Creole nun-poetess increases and the circle of her admirers enlarges. It is not merely the esthetic merit of so much of her verse which brings her this homage—through she is often regarded, as already suggested, as among the greatest poets in the speech of Spain—but, perhaps even more, the complex personality refracted in many of her writings. (Leonard 175)

In the case of this Mexican nun, as pointed out in this passage, the figure of her person looms behind her texts. Her texts, however, stand as more than the literary productions of an impenetrable woman; they are active participants in the world in which she lived. The writings of Sor Juana, though obviously products of her intellect, are best seen in light of the role they played in the literary environment of the time.

The life of the nun, in all cases, is not open to scrutiny. The lack of autobiographical material and other supporting evidence makes it impossible to definitively state anything of the nun’s personal life. The texts themselves, because of the poet’s use of rhetoric and her lack of interest in presenting herself to her reader, do not clearly point to her personal life. It is important to state that even if they did, the life of the author fades in importance in comparison to the study of her texts. As one critic states:

The life of an artist is rightly a unit of study in any biographical series. But to make it the main unit of study in the history of art is like discussing the railroads of a country in terms of the experiences of a single traveler on several of them. To describe railroads accurately, we
are obliged to disregard persons and states, for the railroads themselves are the elements of continuity, and not the travelers or the functionaries thereon. (Kubler 6)

In comparison with the study of literary products, then, the study of the life of the author is narrow and limiting. This is especially true of the study of Sor Juana. To study her texts in light of her life provides a coherent view that limits both the literature and the comprehension of the reader.

To study the works themselves, however, enlarges the scope of the study and makes it more germane to the study of literature in general. Of course, this approach to her writings leads to a less coherent conclusion. By studying the texts themselves and not the woman, coherence is necessarily lost as a singular interpretation can no longer be supported by her diverse literary production. The assumption of a troubled psychology allows for a definitive and conclusive opinion of the talented author. When her works, in and of themselves, are seen as viable topics of study, however, the critic is overwhelmed by the diverse nature of her works, and all hope of coherence is completely lost. As Merrim states, “her oeuvre is not only vast (about nine hundred pages in an edition with no notes), but also generically varied, ideologically and philosophically complex, and remarkably difficult even on the entry levels of syntax and semantics. Scholarly work has only recently made inroads into encompassing Sor Juana’s full corpus of works” (Early xiii). The study of the texts leads the critic down a path full of possibilities and questions with no clear-cut answers. The study of the woman, however full of hasty assumptions and suppositions, leads the critic to a
coherent (if grossly simplistic) view of the texts. The value of these overly simplistic conclusions, however, is questionable.

The little known facts of Sor Juana’s personal life seem to be enough to shroud her in a mystery. The details found in her texts are not enough to lift the veil hiding the woman from the curious eyes of the critic. In her writings, Sor Juana presents an image of herself through rhetoric. Far from believing the image that the nun presents, the critic should utilize the self-portrait provided by the poet as a starting point for a deeper investigation. As the great Ortega y Gasset explains,

Cuando se repite la frase “los árboles no nos dejan ver el bosque”, tal vez no se entiende su rigoroso significado. Tal vez la burla que en ella se quiere hacer vuelva su aguijón contra quien la dice. Los árboles no dejan ver el bosque, y gracias a que así es, en efecto, el bosque existe. La misión de los árboles patentes es hacer latente el resto de ellos, y sólo cuando nos damos perfecta cuenta de que el paisaje visible está ocultando otros paisajes invisibles nos sentimos dentro de un bosque.

(76)

When the phrase “can’t see the forest for the trees” is repeated, maybe its rigorous meaning is not understood. Maybe the offense that is intended in its utterance is turned against the one who utters it. The trees do not allow the forest to be seen, and thanks to that, in actualization, the forest exists. The mission of the prominent trees is to make the rest of the trees obscure, and only when we are perfectly aware that the visible scenery is hiding other invisible sceneries do we feel inside a forest.

The superficial scenery provided by Sor Juana in her texts should be understood as the cover for a deeper, more substantial forest. The texture of Sor Juana’s writings, though formulaic at times, conceals a rich and complex world. This complex world, however, is not necessarily her psychological state. This world, hiding behind a line of trees, may
very well be the Baroque world she lived in: full of rules, contradictions, and room for originality.

The diplomatic and societal functions that her writings served makes the reading of her texts as simple pieces of expression absurd. As Ortega y Gasset further explains, "con haber reconocido en el bosque su naturaleza fugitiva, siempre ausente, siempre oculta—un conjunto de posibilidades—, no tenemos entera la idea del bosque. Si lo profundo y latente ha de existir para nosotros, habrá de presentársenos, y al presentársenos ha de ser en tal forma que no pierda su calidad de profundidad y latencia" (78) ‘having recognized the fugitive nature of the forest, always absent, always hidden—a gathering of possibilities—, we do not have a coherent idea of the forest. If the deep and the obscure is to exist for us, it has to present itself to us, and in presenting itself to us it has to be in such a way that it does not lose its quality of depth and obscurity.’ The expression of the deep and obscure in a superficial manner is not an endeavor that Sor Juana ever undertook. By participating in the literary genres of the day, Sor Juana presents the usual visible scenery. Her rhetorical techniques and her use of certain themes direct our attention to the forest. However, the nun never attempted, in a direct manner, to provide us with a view of the invisible scenery that lay behind her texts.

The light that the study of Sor Juana can shed on the study of women writers is immense. Through the particularities seen in the case of this Mexican nun, the nature of gender limitations and capabilities can be clearly studied. Though some contend that Sor Juana wrote in a ‘womanly manner’ (spontaneously and filled with emotion), this
notion is completely unsupported by the texts themselves. Sor Juana’s example shows that “anatomy is not destiny, but biological differences between the sexes have, throughout human history, been translated by social institutions into codes of behavior and law that privilege men over women irrespective of class” (Ferguson et al. xxi).

The nun displayed the capacity to participate in the literary traditions of the day in accordance to the rules of propriety. What the nun could and could not do was determined by propriety and not biology. Her limitations, as a woman intellectual, were determined by what society believed she should not do.

What this study pretends to accomplish has already been suggested by other critics. As one critic notes, “Sor Juana, like most geniuses, was ahead of her time. Exceptionality, however, is treated differently in men than in women. What I want to suggest is not that we forget that Sor Juana was a woman but that we must reverse the manner in which we respond to that fact” (Arenal Convent 165). The existing problem in the criticism of Sor Juana does not lie in the fact that Sor Juana’s sex is widely known but in that the assumptions made on this fact are quite misogynistic in nature. That Sor Juana is a woman should point us solely to the way that she handled this fact in light of the social limitations placed on women. It should not inform the way that her psychological state is perceived. The fact that she is female, a fact that she never attempts to hide through the use of a pen-name or any other traditional device, should make us aware that in order to continue writing she had to be extremely dogmatic and proper.
The rhetoric that Sor Juana employed in her writings, one of humility, indifference, and subservience, allowed her to participate in realms ordinarily closed to women. Echoing the aims of another critic: “Lo que me interesa comentar en este trabajo es cómo el sujeto femenino que enuncia este discurso intenta autorizarse para entrar en un discurso tradicionalmente masculino y eurocéntrico” (Martinez-San Miguel 260) ‘in this work, what I am interested in is commenting upon how the feminine subject that speaks in this discourse attempts to authorize itself in order to enter into a traditionally masculine and eurocentric discourse.’ By studying rhetorical strategies, the use of tradition, and the role of propriety, the “how” of the question posed above can partially be answered. The value of Sor Juana’s texts, as texts that transcend the socially prescribed boundaries, can be seen also in the lack of other great female writers from her time in the Hispanic canon. As it is noted, the fact “that no other Sor Juana has surfaced in the Hispanic literary world is surely in great part a result of the social circumstances that have kept women in “their place.”” (Arenal Convent 181). Sor Juana’s unique position can afford us the possibility of studying the ways that women, and other peripheral groups, have found to enter into the mainstream. What Sor Juana achieved can be seen as an anomaly in that despite gender she managed to carve a niche for herself in the canon. For this reason, Sor Juana can serve as a standard against which other peripheral authors can be measured.
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Vita

Lilian Albertina Contreras-Silva was born in San Salvador, El Salvador, on February 27, 1973. On January 10, 1981, her family immigrated to New York. After eight months of living there, her family settled in Houma, Louisiana, where her parents still reside. Lilian graduated from Terrebonne High School in Houma and attended Louisiana State University in the fall of the 1990-91 academic year. In May of 1994, Lilian received her bachelor of science degree in microbiology with minors in classical civilization and zoology. After attending medical school for a year, Lilian returned to L.S.U. to study Spanish. She received her master of arts degree in Spanish in May of 1997. Lilian is currently working in a tenure track position teaching Spanish at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas.
Candidate: Lilian A. Contreras-Silva

Major Field: Comparative Literature

Title of Dissertation: Tradition, Rhetoric, and Propriety in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Approved:

[signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[signature]
[signature]
[signature]

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