

8-2010

'Diversa de mí Misma': Silence as performative resistance in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Marcia A. Caltabiano-Ponce
University of Texas-Pan American

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd



Part of the [Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caltabiano-Ponce, Marcia A., "'Diversa de mí Misma': Silence as performative resistance in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" (2010). *Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA*. 154.
https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd/154

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

‘DIVERSA DE MÍ MISMA’: SILENCE AS
PERFORMATIVE RESISTANCE IN
SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

A Thesis

by

MARCIA A. CALTABIANO-PONCE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2010

Major Subject: Spanish

‘DIVERSA DE MÍ MISMA’: SILENCE AS
PERFORMATIVE RESISTANCE IN
SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

A Thesis
by
MARCIA A. CALTABIANO-PONCE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Mónica Diaz
Chair of Committee

Dr. Glenn Martínez
Committee Member

Dr. Guadalupe Cortina
Committee Member

August 2010

Copyright 2010 Marcia A. Caltabiano-Ponce
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Caltabiano-Ponce, Marcia A., “Diversa de mí misma”: Silence as Performative Resistance in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Master of Arts (MA), August, 2010, 120 pages, 54 works cited.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s silences, including her final and mysterious withdrawal from letters, were not empty spaces at all but highly loaded performative resistances to patriarchal control. My work is based on Judith Butler's poststructural theory on performance and subject construction, with support from postcolonial and feminist theories. The approach is a break from the historical and popular gendered discourses that surround her final years, one that explores the loaded gaps and borders that provide liminal spaces for the transcendence of her voice and gender over the ages. I address the research, speculation, and theories that have misread her silences as material, gendered, empty or defeated and that in doing so limit her voice yet again.

DEDICATION

Gratitude, I have found, is perforce a litany to those who graciously indulge us day to day, who suffer our silences and converse with the air as we burrow into books and chase the ghosts of the past. In the only partial atonement and recompense possible, I thank my mother, Angela Tomarchio Caltabiano, for the gift of tenacity and for sharing her unflinching blindness to limitation; my father, Marco Antonio Caltabiano, for his insistence on learning and his words of encouragement; and my husband, Manuel Ponce Avila, for years of unfailing patience, and for not being embarrassed by the woman with her nose buried in books at his beloved soccer games.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I offer my infinite thanks to the chair of my thesis committee, Dr. Mónica Diaz, who gets me, as they say in the vernacular. Without her intuition and guidance, I might never have heard, much less understood, the astounding seventeenth century voice of a woman writing, of a nun stating her case and setting the record straight. From Mónica's first suggestion that I read Helene Cixous for a midterm reseña, to her stress- and knowledge-inducing invitations to translate, collaborate and stretch, she has helped me regain a voice I had thought was lost long ago.

I also thank my committee members, Dr. Glenn Martínez, chair of the Modern Language Department at the University of Texas-Pan American, and Dr. Guadalupe Cortina, for their support and guidance; Professor Emeritus Dr. Lino Garcia Jr., for his friendship and coaching over the years; and Dr. Sandy McGehee, for solid advice interwoven with friendship and commiseration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
A Brief Her-story	9
Childhood: Through a Glass Darkly	9
Court(ing?)	16
Get Thee to a N(one)nnery	24
Unwedded Bliss	32
Talking Back	37
Then Silence. Really?	43
Making sense of h(er)story	49
Lacunae	50
CHAPTER II. SOR JUANA’S STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL: SILENCE, PERFORMANCE, RESISTANCE	52
The Silence that Isn’t	56
In Literature	60
Performance: The ‘Doing’	63
Resistance: Talking Back, Moving Forward	71
CHAPTER III. HEARING SILENCE: The <i>RESPUESTA</i>	76
Summoning Aquinas	77
La Madre del Verbo	81
Naming Silence	82
Moses, the ‘balbuciente’	85

Ruidos	85
Withholding	90
Deconstructing St. Paul	91
Nun, Interrupted	92
A Double Bind	93
‘Obro necesariamente’	96
CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION: THE PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME	100
NOTES	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY. Works Cited	109
Works Consulted	113
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	119

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed*

the blueprint of a life

Adrienne Rich, *Cartographies of Silence*

She is, by her own naming, the worst woman who ever lived. “Yo, la peor del mundo ... I, the worst woman in the world.” Auto-interpellation by hyperbole. Hubris thickly veiled by humility. A Socratic paradox that tells us she knows well that she knows nothing at all. Ironic and didactic, yet lyrical and even parabolic. Signed, very literally, in her own blood.

So much responsibility this terse little phrase has carried over more than three centuries of academic and theoretical speculation. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the alternately celebrated and excoriated seventeenth-century nun, poet and dramatist, left clues that today hover like puffs of smoke across the New Spanish literary landscape. Then she faded from the public eye, all but unnoticed until her death. It was an uncharacteristically understated exit for a woman who had blazed a trail of words throughout her highly celebrated life.

I argue that Sor Juana’s final, protracted “silence” was her loudest statement of all, a Butlerian performative resistance that made up her most ornately layered baroque creation – a condemnation of the criticisms and controls imposed on her, as well as of the agents of power who thought they had outmaneuvered her. The unbroken thread of her voice, however tenuous in

places, serves to tell us that Sor Juana's silences, including that final and mysterious withdrawal from letters, were not empty spaces at all, but highly loaded performances that facilitated her resistance to patriarchal control. This work is based on Judith Butler's poststructural theory on performance and subject construction, with support from postcolonial and feminist theories. The approach breaks from the historical and popular gendered discourses surrounding Sor Juana's final years; rather, I explore the loaded gaps and borders that provide liminal spaces for the transcendence of gender and voice through the ages. I address the existing body of research, speculation, analyses and theories that I believe have misread Sor Juana's final silence as material, gendered, empty or defeated and that in doing so limit her voice yet again.

I offer this as an alternative approach to reading a seventeenth century nun in a convent in New Spain. It is intended as a guide to an uninterrupted voice, one that rejects yet another imposition of silence on Sor Juana's life and work and explains why, after hundreds of years of "silence," we still hear her, loud and clear.

Silence can be, but seldom is, nothingness. For the most part, it is somethingness – presence, gap, absence, action and word. I believe silence is always, in one way or another, a performance. Thus, if worth is to be found in the silences within her work – “lo que no se puede decir” (Paz 17) – how can we not believe that her final silence, too, was filled with worth, with meaning? If at the end she was indeed, as historian Asunción Lavrin believes, simply a hegemonized reflection of her colonizers, why must we assume her silence was empty? Because when she does break that silence, she unleashes the full authority of her power – her words – and in doing so, reclaims the I: “Yo, la peor del mundo.”

Within that theory we find the thread of intentionality, an indication that Sor Juana took a stand at the end of her life, effectively following the path of rebellion that had been ingrained in

her since childhood – since the days of wanting to cut her hair and dress as a boy to attend school; since sneaking off to lessons with her sister; since learning to charm the powerful men and women of the Court with clever word games; and through all the long days of tempering the edge of her superior intellect with velvet mantles of acceptable phrases that might hold the Catholic Church – and its Holy Inquisition – from her doorstep. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was steeped in performance. By all accounts she was a sponge for learning, and all she learned became part of her fabric.

Philosopher and theorist Judith Butler’s complex theory of performance as gender construction says gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.¹ The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (*Gender Trouble* 140).

It is possible to extend Butler’s theory beyond gender constitution to include what she calls “other ritual social dramas” which require “a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.” (*Gender Trouble* 140),

If we revert to Lavrin, who sees Juana’s final years as capitulation, we may indeed lose the thread of what we today believe is the poet’s essence:

Only after she underwent her final spiritual transformation in 1693 do we find in her writings expressions of personal humiliation which bear strong resemblance to those found in the works of other nuns . . . She also asked

to have the following phrase written in the book in which her death would be recorded: 'I have been the worst one. I beg the forgiveness of all my sisters, for the love of God and His mother. I, the worst one in the world, Juana Inés de la Cruz.' Sor Juana had started to write like a model nun. . . . in carrying out this act she joined the company of the typical female religious writers of the seventeenth century. (70-71)

Sor Juana, "typical"? By all accounts, she had never been "typical" in any way or at any time throughout her extraordinary life. Why start at the end? However, if we consider her final years as atypical of what was considered the norm for the time, we actually can make some sort of sense of a final silence as a performative resistance to Church authority. In viewing those final years as performative, we quite clearly have reenactments of mundane, ritualized social dramas that provided legitimation in her time of need. Dazzling wordplay, usage of the rhetoric of false humility, not saying what must not be said yet still finding ways to say it – Juana, like water on stone, had begun in childhood to find ways around or through obstacles by using words. Often cloaked in the acceptable ritual social dramas of the day, she performed her gender, she performed her role as a lady-in-waiting, and she performed her role as nun, while under those mantles of performance fermented the construction of her identity as a writer and student of the world's wonders.

And so, I disagree that the words "I, the worst one in the world, Juana Inés de la Cruz," signaled capitulation of any sort, and I argue that they are not in any way humble. They are dramatic and extreme, a final *bon mot* from a woman who must be the best at being the worst,

and not just unworthy, but the most unworthy. This is false modesty rendered eloquent defiance, Sor Juana's way of penetrating the (self?)imposed withdrawal of those final years.

Still, we have few definitive answers about that most critical time in Sor Juana's life, mainly the tantalizing path of her earlier words – some thickly and protectively veiled, others cleverly manipulated to suit either her own needs or the needs of the Catholic Church that controlled, or tried to control, her pen. Did she indeed, as some have speculated, see the error of her ways and silence herself? Did she fear the fires and killing fields of the Spanish Inquisition? Did she truly mean that she was “la peor del mundo”? Did she believe it? Is it a sad, lonely, defeated exit from life and letters, or a proud and clever exhortation that her detractors should hurl themselves from a great height?

Ah, Sor Juana's subtexts. Most theorists now agree that what she did not say was just as important as what she did say.

But what do we know, really?

We know that in November of 1690 she transgressed, overstepping the bounds of womanly and nunly comportment to challenge, in writing, certain points of theology in an already forty-year-old sermon by Antonio de Vieira, one of the Church's most distinguished and powerful Jesuit theologians. That she had been asked to do so by her friend, the bishop of Puebla, seems to have been of no consequence. Called the *Carta atenagórica*, her letter set off a chain of events that would change her life forever, and it is there that the intrigue, the betrayal, and the speculation truly begin.

We know that she transgressed yet again – in writing – oddly waiting three months to offer her response to the bishop's very public written censure of her writing. Known today as the *Respuesta a sor Filotea*, Sor Juana's letter of self-defense has been taken up and carried as a

banner for feminism and emancipation and remains a battle cry for gender and postcolonial resistance. Literary theorists and *sorjuanistas* for years have studied her *Respuesta* and other works for clues to her final silence – if silence it indeed was – searching for words that may have foreshadowed a silence of any sort. Did her writings somehow provide philological, ontological or psychological direction that she would be capable of an almost complete withdrawal from letters, learning and life?

We know that in 1694 she emptied her convent cell of its impressive library, giving away or selling the thousands of books and instruments, both musical and scientific, that she had amassed as part of her lifelong quest for knowledge. Many have postulated that it was a forced submission to the demands of an unforgiving Church hierarchy. Grady Wray tells us that in April of 1693, Aguiar y Seijas and his vicar general, Antonio de Aunzibar y Anaya, had begun “a secret episcopal process against Sor Juana accusing her of heresy, disrespect for authority and activities incompatible with her monastic state” (8). The result of that censure was that she “was forced to admit her guilt, to publish no longer, and to relinquish her belongings and library to the Archbishop, among other things” (8). Some believe the dissolution of her library stemmed from her not unfounded fear of Inquisitional retribution. And some believe she had seen her own hubris in wanting knowledge and decided to purge her soul with an act of altruism. No matter the reasons, the dismantling of her library was the emotional and intellectual flagellation of a woman who had fought her entire life to be allowed to study and learn. The real question is whether it was Sor Juana’s own choice, or whether it had been imposed upon her by a patriarchal Church as punishment for stepping beyond the strictures deemed politically, sociologically and theocratically acceptable for women at that time. Most *sorjuanistas* today believe it was Aguiar y Seijas’ attempt to put an end to Sor Juana’s writing, “whether theological or secular” (Wray 8).

Still, we know that even in the aftermath of the *Respuesta* Sor Juana did indeed continue to write the devotional materials encouraged by Church leaders. Wray tells us her *Villancicos de Santa Catarina* were sung in the Oaxaca cathedral on November 25, 1691; a second volume of her works was published in 1692 and she included in it the *Carta atenagórica* under her own title, *Crisis sobre un sermón*; and in the second half of 1693, she wrote and sent the *Enigmas ofrecidos a la Casa del Placer* to Spain at the request of the Condesa de Paredes, who had commissioned it for a group of Portuguese nuns living in a community they called La Casa del Placer, established as a “virtual and utopian all-female writing community that challenged the Church’s disapproval of female intellectual activity ...” (Kirk 130).

As we can see, Sor Juana’s literary production, both secular and devotional, continued during her final years. “At her death in 1695, 180 volumes of selected works along with fifteen folders of her writings were found in her cell” (Wray 8).

Introducing yet another polemic into the debate over Sor Juana’s final years was the discovery by a Jesuit priest, in Madrid in 1960, of a letter now known as the *Carta de Serafina de Cristo*. Written about a month after the *Respuesta* and signed by “Serafina de Cristo,” the letter was a staunch defense of Sor Juana in the wake of the publication of the *Carta atenagórica* and Sor Juana’s response to the bishop. Stephanie Kirk tells us that regarded *sorjuanista* Elías Trabulse was the first to bring the letter into the spotlight, claiming “in his article and paleographic transcription of the letter that it was written by Sor Juana herself and addressed to the Bishop of Puebla . . . He believes its intention was to reveal to her addressee that the real target of the *Carta atenagórica* was not Vieira, but rather her erstwhile confessor . . . According to Trabulse, Serafina’s letter is the satirical counterpart to the *Respuesta* . . .” (131-132)

Refutation of Trabulse's theory arrived in 1998 with publication of *Serafina y Sor Juana*, a book by Antonio Alatorre and Lilia Tenorio. They used "critical, philological, historical, biographical, and even graphological tools," Kirk says, to show that Trabulse was wrong, "arguing that the *Carta atenagórica* was indeed written to impugn Vieira directly" (132). Alatorre and Tenorio maintain that Sor Juana was meant to be the recipient of the *Carta de Serafina de Cristo*, and they point to poet, contemporary, and Sor Juana supporter Juan Ignacio de Castorena y Ursúa as the author. Kirk characterizes the evidence they present, including extensive rhetorical and philological analysis, as "slight and unconvincing" (132). Given the instability of research and theories surrounding authorship of the *Carta de Serafina de Cristo*, it is difficult to include the letter in a discussion of the written production of Sor Juana's years after the *Respuesta*. The possibility remains that neither theory carries any weight because the letter's provenance remains so highly contested. However, Kirk asks us to consider an alternative reading of Sor Juana's solitude in later years as strategic, part of an intellectual female alliance that includes the *Carta de Serafina de Cristo* and *Los Enigmas* – the *Serafina* as a defense of female intellectuality written by a nun other than Sor Juana, and the enigmas as writing by Sor Juana for other nuns who admired and supported her intellect (130).

To return to what we know, documents show us that in 1694 she reaffirmed her vows and, in the convent's *Libro de profesiones*, signed a profession of faith in her own blood. And we know that shortly after that, in the destructive wake of Mexico City's floods and famine, she tended her Hieronymite sisters during an epidemic, generally said to be a plague of some sort. She succumbed to that unidentified virulence on April 17, 1695. She was forty-six years old.

We can ruminate all we like on the reasons for the mystery of her final – "silent" – years, but until we know the events and patterns in her life that led to her final days, we cannot begin

to hear, much less purport to understand, what happened in those critical years before her death. Accounts of Sor Juana's life and death vary greatly, from her own autobiographical assertions, to those of her biographers, up through the historical explorations and literary analyses of today, with fact and fancy mingling to spin an intriguing, always provocative story of a life of letters lived simultaneously in spotlight and in shadow.

A Brief Her-story

Childhood –Through a glass darkly

Octavio Paz, in his 1982 master biographical opus, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe*, draws firmly on a tasty albeit often contestable mix of historical research, Freudian psychoanalysis and unabashed speculation, only to tell us (rather anticlimactically) that the most defining patterns of Juana's life were set in childhood: “En la situación infantil ya estaban inscritos todos los pasos del destino de Juana Inés: la renuncia al matrimonio, la celda-biblioteca de la edad madura, la rebelión contra la autoridad” (Paz 124). He is not suggesting psychological determinism, he tells us – and rejects the denial of free will determinism might entail; rather, he says, he is merely connecting the dots: “muestro la conjunción entre el carácter y las circunstancias sociales” (124).

Those circumstances include her illegitimacy,² the impact of her learned grandfather on her formative years, and her virtual abandonment by a largely absentee father – a Basque captain named Pedro Manuel de Asbaje y Vargas Machuca who already was married when he arrived in New Spain and had three daughters with Isabel Ramírez. Juana was their middle child.³

When Asbaje died, Isabel introduced another man into their lives, yet another captain, Diego Ruiz Lozano, to whom she soon would bear a son. We do not know exactly why Juana's

mother sent her to live with an aunt and uncle, the Matas, in Amecameca – what Abreu Gómez refers to as a “sitio de más recursos” (Abreu Gómez 322) – but Paz is seldom afraid to take a blind dive into the murky waters of Sor Juana’s psyche: “Tal vez por esto Isabel decidió enviar a Juana Inés con los Mata. Si es exacta mi hipótesis, el año de 1656 fue axial en su destino: su salida hacia México coincidió con la desaparición de su abuelo y la aparición de su medio hermano Diego” (Paz 126).

Paz’s characterization of Juana’s short time with relatives is a patchwork of largely dark speculations punctuated by Juana’s emotional isolation: “Es indudable que muy pronto se dio cuenta de que no tenía sitio en el mundo. El estudio . . . fue otra vez su escudo contra los otros y contra sí misma” (127). Ultimately, Paz reduces Juana’s place in her family and in the world to one of inconvenience and economic burden: “Tal vez Juana Inés, más que un testigo indiscreto de la vida de Isabel Ramírez, representaba una carga económica que ésta no podía soportar” (129). Unable to fit in with the family, she is shuffled off to Court, he tells us, with the presumed hope that there she will make a profitable match. When that fails, she is shuffled off to the convent. In the New Spain of the seventeenth century, the silence of the convent was all that was left to a woman in Juana’s socially undefended position.

Twelve years (and a theoretical lifetime) after Paz, Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell offer a far less speculative account of her childhood, one based more on sociological realities than on the phantoms of posthumous psychological exploration. Born in Nepantla to an unmarried and illiterate but strong and highly capable mother, Juana grew up at Hacienda de Panoayán on Church-owned ranchland that her grandfather leased and her mother managed. She had access – sometimes gained by youthful subterfuge – to the sort of learning that the other girls and women of her time either spurned or were denied:

Juana was exposed early in life to all levels of culture. She experienced music, art, and magic, native and imported. She heard the liturgy in Latin, cultured conversation in Spanish, and colloquial communication . . .

Juana's grandfather, Pedro Ramírez de Santillana, was a learned man . . .

His large library fed the young Juana's appetite for reading. By the time her elders wished to still her curiosity, she had become so knowledgeable that they could neither put a stop to her restless quest nor convince her it was inappropriate. From book learning she drew authority and legitimacy for differing in her studious propensities, views, and aims from other Catholics, women, and Mexicans. (Arenal and Powell 2-3)

Gone from the Arenal/Powell account are Paz's dour declarations of despair and isolation, replaced by a more clinical analysis of events as documented by Sor Juana's biographers, and by Sor Juana herself. "Knowing that women were not allowed to attend the university in Mexico City . . . she made the best of an isolated, self-directed schooling: she devoured books initially in Panoayán . . . then at court in Mexico City, and finally in the voluminous library she amassed in the convent" (3). In Arenal/Powell, we find a grounded representation of the bright girl who was not yet 14 when she wrote her first poem, of the child prodigy who learned Latin almost effortlessly (a fact Sor Juana does not hesitate to proffer in later writings as proof of her solid academic footing).

The charm is evident in Juana's own account (given in the *Respuesta*) of how she could:

read soon after she learned to walk, how she took to rhyming as others take to their native tongue, and how she became competent in Latin shortly after taking up its study has in the imagination of readers outweighed her insistence that her prodigious learning reflected tenacious effort even more than a sharp memory. (3)

Perhaps the most immediate account of her life published after her death in 1695 comes to us from Padre Diego Calleja, a Jesuit who in 1700 penned her biography, *Vida de Sor Juana*. For Calleja, Paz says, Sor Juana's life was "un gradual ascenso hacia la santidad" (Paz 13). Indeed, in the Catholic Church's cheerleading spirit and with the propangandizing intention of the *vida* genre, there is a shameless glaze of saintliness over the entire work, to such extent that Calleja even denies Sor Juana's illegitimacy⁴:

Fue su padre D. Pedro Manuel de Asvaje . . . pasó a Indias, donde casó este dichoso Vizcaino con Dña. Isabel Ramírez de Cantillana . . . de cuya legítima unión tuvieron, entre otros hijos, a nuestra poetisa única, que fue posible admitir igualdad en la sangre, la que pareció no tener parentesco humano con otras almas. (16-17)

Juana was just three years old when she learned to read, Calleja tells us, sneaking away from her mother to attend private lessons that a learned woman, a "Maestra," was providing for her older sister. "En dos años, aprendió a leer, escribir, contar y todas las menudencias curiosas de labor blanca . . . La primera luz que rayó de su ingenio, fue hacia los versos españoles, y era

muy racional admiración de cuantos la trataron en aquella edad tierna, ver la facilidad con que salían a su boca o su pluma los consonantes y los números . . . ” (17-18)

According to Calleja, Juana was not yet eight years old when, tempted by the promise of winning a book, she composed a *loa* – a short play that serves as prelude to a longer, often religious, presentation – for the feast of the Holy Sacrament. And he offers testimony from an instructor, Martin de Olivas, who says she learned Latin in just ten (Juana says fewer than twenty) lessons. As to the much debated story about Sor Juana cutting her hair, Calleja tells us it was tied to her goal of learning her Latin lessons quickly: “añadió ella por decisión su empeño, cortándose del cabello algo y notificandose que, si hasta cierta medida del hombro crecía otra vez sin haber aprendido lo que se tasaba, se le había de volver a cortas, cosa que no tal vez la ejecutó” (20-21). (Those who have speculated that wanting to cut her hair was an indication of latent lesbian tendency might consider as well her youthful cleverness at measuring the passage of time by the pace of her hair growth, something with which she would have been intimately familiar.)

Calleja sums up her childhood talents in few words, saying, “Volaba la fama de habilidad tan nunca vista en tan pocos años” (21). But she was far too distracted by her studies, he says, and far too beautiful for her own good, so her family decided to safeguard her by sending her to Court under the protection of the Marqués de Mancera and his wife.

Calleja’s account, unlike Paz’s, is filled with light and positivity, with the clean and shiny glaze of a Church-directed discourse that maintains Sor Juana’s character as unimpeachable. There is no social censure here for illegitimacy, no disapproval for overstepping the bounds of womanly seemliness to reject marriage and immerse herself in learning. Her marriage is to Jesus, and her talent and brilliance are God-bestowed gifts utilized to bring him glory.

Not surprisingly, the most fascinating of all the accounts of Juana's childhood is her own, delivered in the *Respuesta*. This letter of self-defense makes a willing and voyeuristic accomplice of the reader, unveiling the complex details of her thoughts and feelings like an intricate clockwork laboring in absolute synchronization.

She recounts that, at roughly three years of age, she trailed after her sister to visit a woman, called an "*amiga*," who was teaching her sibling to read: "me llevó a mí tras ella el cariño y la travesura; y viendo que la daban lección, me encendí yo de manera en el deseo de saber leer, que engañando, a mi parecer, a la maestra, la dije que mi madre ordenaba me diese lección" (48)⁵. By the time Juana's mother learned of the deception, the child already had learned to read.

By her own account, we see an affectionate, vivacious child, a small girl who is intelligent to the point of prodigy, but also one who is not above self-deprivation. While she admits to having a child's normal affection for treats, it is exceptional enough to note that she would force herself to abstain from eating cheese because she had heard that it made people stupid, "y podía conmigo más el deseo de saber que el de comer" (48).

When she was about six years old, she heard that there were schools in Mexico City where one could study the sciences. She begged her mother to dress her as a boy and send her. Her mother understandably refused, so little Juana filled the void by reading her grandfather's books, despite the family's attempts to prevent that academic outlet as well (48).

And Sor Juana's own telling of the hair-cutting story? She had started to study Latin:

. . . y era tan intenso mi cuidado, que siendo así que en las mujeres – y más en tan florida juventud – es tan apreciable el adorno natural del cabello,

yo me cortaba de él cuatro o seis dedos, midiendo hasta dónde llegaba antes, e imponiéndome ley de que si cuando volviese a crecer hasta allí no sabía tal o tal cosa que me había propuesto deprender en tanto que crecía, me lo había de volver a cortar en pena de la rudeza . . . el pelo crecía aprisa y yo aprendía despacio, y con efecto le cortaba en pena de la rudeza: que no me parecía razón que estuviese de cabellos cabeza que estaba tan desnuda de noticias, que era más apetecible adorno. (50)

It is of note that Sor Juana the adult characterizes Juana the child as she does – strong, headstrong and strong-willed. What is there about Juana, either as a child or as an adult, that would lead us to believe she would be capable of a complete surrender of her personality, indeed of her very essence?

It also is of note that here, and with no fanfare, Juana closes the door on her childhood and jumps ahead 10 years, bypassing her time at Court and fast-forwarding to her decision to take the veil. The revelation is abrupt and untrumpeted, an almost offhand revelation about a decision that would determine the next decades of her life. She was talking about her childhood decision to cut her hair and then, in the same breath, this: “Entréme religiosa . . .” (50). She does not look back on her five years at Court.

It is a gap, a blatant silence, a pivotal withholding of information and communication, and it provides a clue to the “silent” years yet to come: Sor Juana is indeed capable of using silence for her own purposes. That which she does not want us to know, she does not feel compelled to share. Most fascinating is this lack of information, not for whatever juicy tidbits the gap might have held, but because it is an example of the silent performances that marked her life.

That she chose a silence – that event in itself is what has meaning, not the voyeuristic speculations we might use to fill that silence more than three hundred years later. Only historical certainties would give such a gap renewed meaning.

Court(ing?)

Juana Ramírez y Asbaje was just 16 when the new viceregal couple, Antonio Sebastian de Toledo, the Marqués de Mancera, and his wife the marquesa, Leonor Carreto, arrived in Mexico City. Hearing of the child Juana's prodigious talent, they sent for her and she was presented to them at the Viceregal Court of King Carlos II in Mexico City. Leonor accepted Juana as a lady-in-waiting, and she would spend five years there.

It should come as no surprise that Paz for his part sets great store by Sor Juana's decision to time-lapse 10 years of her life. It constitutes a "laguna" in the *Respuesta*, he tells us, an absence that represents "diez años decisivos" (126). For Paz, the paucity of information from Sor Juana about her years at Court is above all a rich lode for psychoanalysis. He is obsessed with the Royal Court's carnal intrigues and games of seduction, historicized and analyzed in six pages about the *galanteos de palacio* that acted as systematized seduction – "Todos los ritos eróticos son sexualidad socializada; los eran sexualidad transformada en teatro . . ." (138) – and thereby provide a socio-historical backdrop to legitimize his repeated speculation about whether Sor Juana did indeed have an "affaire de coeur" (and whether it might have been with a man or a woman).

Es imposible, alegan muchos críticos, que Juana Inés haya vivido en el torbellino de la corte cinco años – los más impresionables en la vida de

una mujer, cuando su ser entero se abre a los sentidos y los sentidos se abren al mundo exterior – y que haya salido indemne. Ya dije que sería absurdo descartar la posibilidad de escarceos y amoríos. Es posible que se haya enamorado o que haya creído, como ocurre en esa edad, que estaba enamorada.” (144)

Mexican poet Amado Nervo in his 1910 book *Juana de Asbaje* first furthered the lore (lure) of an unattainable love, or a lost love, for Sor Juana – all undocumented. But Dorothy Schons as early as 1926 had tried to dissuade those, like Nervo, who would romanticize Juana’s decision to enter the convent by attributing it to a failed affair of the heart. Schons clearly dismisses such speculation as “romantic legend”: “The story is based on nothing more substantial than the fact that her works contain a large number of love lyrics. This is insufficient evidence on which to build a case” (Schons 142).

Writing in the 1940s, *sorjuanista* Ermilo Abreu Gómez also rejects conjecture about Juana’s time at court:

Es posible que en aquel mundo cortesano haya sufrido desdenes, por su situación de hija natural o por su condición criolla; todo agravado por el recelo que ofrecía su evidente belleza y su insólito ingenio. Buena parte de la sociedad de entonces era apicarada y audaz. Para percibir esto basta leer a los cronistas de la época. El *Diario de Sucesos Notables* de Robles y Guijo abunda en noticias que revelan desorden espiritual e inmoralidad en la vida social y aún en la eclesiástica. Los Arzobispos lucharon por

mejorar esta situación y dieron normas para elevarla a un plano de dignidad. (322)

While Abreu Gómez does call attention to Juana's beauty and singular genius, he, like Paz, summons accounts of the moral dissipation of the Royal Court at that time. It is interesting to note that Abreu Gómez refers not just to Juana's "situation" as an illegitimate daughter, but also to her "condición criolla," a fact of racial caste that in seventeenth century New Spain would have placed her roughly in the middle of the social pecking order (just as she was her father's middle child). She was white, not indigenous, and born to Spanish parents, but she had been born not in Spain but in the New World. In the strata of the colonial microcosm of New Spain, it was a distinction that mattered.

To return to Paz, his attempt at didactic legitimization also sets the stage for his subsequent postulations about her sexual predilection and what he calls her tendency to "masculinization." He cites a speech by Leonor, the protagonist in Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa*, as being a frank confirmation of his theories about the "moeurs," or the collective social behaviors, of the Court. He believes it represents an indirect autobiographical account:

Entre estos aplausos yo,
con la atención zozobrando
entre tanta muchedumbre,
sin hallar seguro blanco,
no acertaba a amar a alguno,
viéndome amada de tantos.

Sin temor en los concursos
defendía my recato ...
con peligros del peligro
y con el daño del daño.
Con una afable modestia
igualando el agasajo,
quitaba lo general,
lo sospechoso al agrado. (Sor Juana, cited in Paz 145)

At no time does Juana talk of marriage here, he says, nor does she hint at such a possibility: “su juego se reduce a ‘defender su recato’.” (145) For Paz, it is Juana’s “naturaleza psicológica,” this absence of interest in a state of matrimonial bliss, that is most telling. He warns us to keep in mind her extreme intellectualism, her adversity to marriage, and the attitudes about men and women that she reveals in her writings. He only barely falls short of a drumroll in dropping the “H” bomb: “Ya escribí, en mi pequeño ensayo de 1950,⁶ que si ‘sería excesivo hablar de homosexualidad, no lo es advertir que ella misma no ocultaba la ambigüedad de sus sentimientos’. Sobre esto es difilísimo tener una idea clara.” (145)

Antiquity handed down two archetypal women, Paz says, Venus and Diana. Those, presumably, are the only two choices he will consider: “Es claro que la personalidad de Juana Inés estaba más cerca de la segunda que de la primera: Diana no es la diosa del matrimonio sino de la vida casta y solitaria de los cazadores” (146). And that confirms for Paz that it was not possible that she had had a lover at Court. Besides, he says, there is no documentation to prove that she did have one. On this point, he says, “el silencio de la poetisa es absoluto” (147).

A path of conjecture had been set, however, well before Paz had renewed his fascination with *La Décima Musa* in 1950. Spanish literary critic and historian Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo in 1927 had written of Juana, “She was a most beautiful woman ... She was also a woman of the most vehement and passionate emotions ... [U]nder these circumstances it was unlikely that she not love and be loved” (Merrim 17).⁷ It is not a view that held up under twentieth century feminist scrutiny, and Stephanie Merrim, in the first chapter of her compilation of articles about Sor Juana, says Menéndez y Pelayo’s statement is an attempt to domesticate Sor Juana by highlighting her “female” emotions and motivations, “conforming her life story to a more conventional feminine mode.”

German historian and Menéndez y Pelayo disciple Ludwig Pfandl, not content to simply follow his mentor’s phallogentric lead, in *Die Zehte Muse von Mexico, Juana Inés de la Cruz. Ihr Leben, ihre Dichtung, Ihre Psyche* published in Munich in 1946, forays into a dark and pretentiously jaw-dropping psychoanalysis of Juana’s neuroses:

Juana Inés es el tipo clásico de una psiconeurótica. Ninguna persona que nos haya seguido hasta aquí con atención podrá negar este hecho. Pero asimismo nadie tendrá razón para deducir de este juicio una despreciable valoración de la personalidad de Juana. En este conocimiento justamente, y sólo en él, se encuentra la clave para la interpretación de su vida, de su espíritu, de sus escritos. Por causa de la reprimida curiosidad infantil, se origina primeramente su anormal afán de saber y su obsesionante cavilar, de los cuales intentará deshacerse por medio de la sublimación, a veces fracasando y otras teniendo éxito; en segundo lugar, su querer-ser-hombre.

Lo irrealizable al término de este desenvolvimiento, de esta intermitente y femenina situación-Édipo, da lugar a una conmovedora paternoidentificación y a la retornante y definitiva fijación sobre el complejo de masculinidad. Este mismo impedirá en la pubertad la consumación de la normal elección de objeto y determinará inevitablemente el narcisismo secundario. La identificación con el padre y el deseo, después de continuar siendo niña, subsisten por y a través de todo este desarrollo. (Pfandl, SJIC Project)

Unable (or unconcerned) to mask his belief in the absolute superiority of maleness, the fervently Catholic Pfandl tells us that Juana was terribly flawed, “una personalidad trágica en el sentido más hondo de la palabra. Su tragedia consistió en que no quiso ser mujer aunque había nacido mujer” (Pfandl SJIC Project).⁸ As the fervently Catholic men of her own time had believed, her aspirations to Otherness were transgression, making of her an anomaly, a woman “que no tenía sitio en el mundo,” as Paz has told us. Pfandl “notoriously and censoriously attributes the writer’s literary production (sic) to the narcissistic displacement onto literature of her ‘feminine’ maternal instincts” (Merrim 13).

Helmut Hatzfeld, in a 1948 review of Pfandl’s *Die Zehte Muse von Mexico*, does little to dispel the misogynistic discourse carried forward from the seventeenth century:

Pfandl explains Sor Juana’s propensity to learning and intellectual activity as the typical attitude of the “intersexual” woman who wants to have a

virile compensation for the shortcomings in her femininity. This unnatural intellectuality turns out an unsatisfactory attempt of sublimation, reveals all the more her maternal suppressed “cry for the child,” drives her into a poetry of love casuistry. Sticking, however consciously to her intellectuality as such, Sor Juana develops a narcissistic egocentric pride. (79-80)

Nothing casuistic about Hatzfeld’s argument: Note the use of the word “intersexual.” Here again was a blatant, overly constructed attempt to place Sor Juana in a physical limbo, painting her as nothing more than a hermaphroditic anomaly, a failure who did not know how to be a good woman, and who never would be a man no matter how desperately she wanted to be. “Not recognizing this pride,” Hatzfeld theorizes, “pampered at the court of the vicereine [Leonor] de Mancera, she enters religion at seventeen to have her revenge on the other sex which she is unable to love and to castrate herself symbolically, a censorship on her not entirely repressed sexuality” (80). His psychotheory serves today merely to underscore how deeply entrenched was (and perhaps continues to be) the popular discourse that the only acceptable options for “real” women were to fall in love, marry and bear children in order to be fulfilled.

Even Argentine filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg, drawing heavily on Paz’s biography of Sor Juana for her 1990 movie, *Yo, la peor de todas*, takes a cinematic flight of fancy to bring us Juana’s first kiss at Court (it was from a male admirer), as well as her second kiss (this one from a woman, and the vicereine, at that). To reiterate Paz’s words, “Sobre esto es difilísimo tener una idea clara.”

Not so for Calleja; his idea of Sor Juana’s life is a crystalline wash of Church-sanctioned goodness from a seventeenth century spinmaster. While he does not gloss over Juana’s time at

Court, neither does he bother to dwell on a topic as morally murky for a clergyman as carnal love; instead, he paints the Royal Court as a platform to highlight Juana's intellectual precocity (presuming she utilized that brilliance solely to bring glory to God). She was much admired, Calleja tells us, and arrived at Court as a favorite, especially of the vicereine: "La señora Virreina no parece que podía vivir un instante sin su Juana Inés, y ella no perdía por eso el tiempo a su estudio" (22). The viceroy, too, admired young Juana's intelligence and sought to test its limits. According to Calleja, Mancera

juntó un día en su palacio cuantos hombres profesaban letras en la Universidad y ciudad de México. El número de todos llegaría a cuarenta y en las profesiones eran varios, como teólogos, escriturados, filósofos, matemáticos, historiadores, poetas, humanistas y no pocos los que . . . llamamos tertulios. No desdeñaron la niñez (tenía Juana Inés no más que diez y siete años) . . . (23)

Juana astounded all the learned men of the court with her responses to their questions and admirably weathered their attempts to find the limits of her knowledge and intelligence, Calleja says. As proof, he summons the words of the viceroy himself: "*a la manera que un galeón real⁹ (traslado las palabras de su Exca.) se defendería de pocas chalupas, que le embistieran, así de desembarazaba Juana Inés de las preguntas, argumentos y réplicas, que tantos, cada uno en su clase, la propusieron.*" (23-24)

Her obvious and undisputed intelligence would have been a powerful attraction, according to Calleja, who, feeling he had to defend her chasteness at Court, paints for us an

innocent who is the soul of modesty trapped in a less than wholesome and mundane ambience: “Entre las lisonjas de esta no popular aura vivía esta discretísima mujer” (24).

Whether she truly was courted at Court, whether she fell victim to the licentious games of a dissipated world, or whether she loved chastely (man or woman), we can have absolutely no idea: No written or historical documentation supports any such liaison. The closest we can get to her affairs of the heart is through (im)pure speculation, by traversing the educated but inventive minefield of psychoanalysis; by piecing together an always incomplete patchwork of seventeenth century historical and sociological data; and by diving headlong into our own readings of her works, a cannibalistic act that appropriates her meaning as our own and, with each new reading, risks losing forever the reality of Juana’s life.

Get Thee to A N(one)nery

The question of why Juana – by all accounts beautiful, brilliant and headstrong – would have entered the convent is one of the much-debated circumstances of her life. Did she have a true religious calling? Was it the desperation of economic necessity? Was she fleeing a courtly lover who had broken her heart? Her decision on the surface appeared uncharacteristic: She entered the Convent of the Discalced Carmelites of St. Joseph on August 14, 1667.

It would have been a hard life for a woman as spirited as Juana. If the original Carmelite Order was known for its Rule of cloister and contemplation, the reformed branch – known as the Discalced Carmelite Order – added worldly deprivation to an already rigid spiritual regimen. A completely new branch of the Order, it was founded in 1562 by Spanish Carmelites St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross, both of them mystics, and the word “discalced” exemplified

their philosophy. They were symbolically “unshod,” wearing only rope sandals instead of cloth or leather shoes, in keeping with their severely austere and ascetic way of life (OCDS).

Juana stayed with the Discalced Carmelites for three months. Citing health reasons, she left on November 18, 1667, and returned to Court. We can only speculate about why she would have chosen an Order as stringent as that one. We do know from direct references in her writings that she had read St. Teresa’s work, but we have no clue as to whether that would have been sufficient to influence such a dramatic, seemingly drastic, decision. Beyond that, again, is silence. Calleja completely omits her failed sojourn with the Discalced Carmelites, and Juana does not tell us about it. What we know skims us forward to her decision to enter the Convento de la Religiosas de San Jerónimo in Mexico City in 1669.

Again, many have analyzed her words and her social situation in the hopes of discovering why she chose the convent over the Court, and Calleja’s *Vida* gives us the hagiographical rhetoric common in this kind of narrative. First, she needed to be protected because of her beauty:

que la buena cara de una mujer pobre es una pared blanca donde no hay
necio que no quiera echar su borrón; que aun la medida de su honestidad
sirve de riesgo, porque hay ojos que en el hielo deslizan más, y, finalmente,
que las flores más bellas manoseadas son desperdicio y culto divino en las
macetas del altar . . . (24-25)

Typically, it paints the young Juana in purity metaphors, as a “white wall”

on which men would have wanted to scribble; as a beautiful flower that, once handled, would have been besmirched and thus, a waste; whose very honesty and innocence is a powerful lure to men whose gaze, encountering the “ice” of her rejection, would slide even farther into error. Having established her physical and moral purity – much as he had established her legitimacy of birth and hence the purity of blood required for entering the convent – he states her dedication to serve God in a convent without ever having fallen prey even to the thought of the licentiousness of marriage: “desde esta edad tan floreciente se dedicó a servir a Dios en una clausura religiosa, sin haber jamás amagado su pensamiento a dar oídos a las licencias del matrimonio” (25).

Here, even Calleja seems to be forced into speculation: She had made her decision to enter the convent, perhaps secretly persuaded that marriage would have been an impossibility, especially for one for whom there could be found no equal: “quizás persuadida de secreto la Americana Fénix a que era imposible este lazo, en quien no podía hallar par en el mundo” (25). Left to the Church’s spinmaster, Juana is without equal in the world (the implication being that no man would have been worthy of the beauty and brilliance of the American Phoenix, as she already was called) and her decision had to do with absolutes rather than with the extreme insecurity of her social and economic station in seventeenth century New Spain.

After Calleja’s cleverly written yet cryptic account of her decision to take the veil, we find a time warp of about two years as he skips forward to Juana’s relationship with her most famous confessor, Padre Antonio Núñez de Miranda, and her acceptance into the Convento de San Jerónimo.

It was Nuñez de Miranda who helped along her decision, Calleja says, but we note here a hint that Juana was not completely at ease with entering a convent. The bait was simple: to lure her with the possibility of marrying her own worldly knowledge with religious doctrine.

Comunicó, los recelos de su vocación, Juana Inés con barón tan ilustre, que a fuer de luz la quitó el miedo: porque siendo el consultado de tal familia,¹⁰ claro estaba que no le había de parecer difícil caber dentro de un alma grande talentos de sabiduría hermandados con grandes virtudes religiosas y que se oponían a éstas, la dijo, era mucha ganancia esconder los talentos; con que depuesta la repugnancia resolvió Juana Inés con denuedo piadoso, dejar en su mundo su inclinación a la sabiduría humana, y en cada libro que abandonaba degollarle a Dios un Isaac ... (Calleja 26)

By sacrificing (slitting the throat of) her worldly books (Isaac), Juana is elevated to the level of Abraham, who blindly followed God's orders to sacrifice that which he loved most, his son Isaac. In the Bible, Isaac is spared, so it is a poignant irony that should not be lost on us that ultimately, Juana's "Isaacs," her books, were indeed sacrificed and lost to her toward the end of her life.

It was done, then. San Jerónimo soon became the "mar pacífico" in which this pilgrim enclosed herself, Calleja writes: "Allí profesó" (27).

Juana gives us her own version of her decision to take the veil, and it is a crystalline, unadorned and unrationalized account of a rational decision. To understand why she donned a habit and locked herself away behind cloistered walls, the following passage from the *Respuesta* is critical:

Entréme religiosa, porque aunque conocía que tenía el estado cosas (de

las accesorias hablo, no de las formales), muchas repugnantes a mi genio, con todo, para la negación que tenía al matrimonio, era lo menos desproporcionado y lo más decente que podía elegir en material de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación; a cuyo primer respeto (como al fin más importante) cedieron y sujetaron la cerviz todas las impertinencias de mi genio, que eran de querer vivir sola; de no querer tener ocupación obligatoria que embarazase la libertad de mi estudio, ni rumor de comunidad que impidiese el sosegado silencio de mis libros. Esto me hizo vacilar algo en la determinación, hasta que alumbrándome personas doctas de que era tentación, la vencí con el favor divino, y tomé el estado que tan indignamente tengo. (50)

She is quite clear and frank: She was absolutely unwilling to marry; she needed a quiet place to study; and while a large community of noisy women would not be an ideal choice, it was the least unfitting and most decent place available to her. All of those considerations “sujetaron la cerviz,” she writes. Bowed to the yoke. It is a telling rhetoric, this less than glowing testimonial to her decision. She waivered, she says, “hasta que alumbrándome personas doctas,” she made her decision. Given Calleja’s information that it was Núñez de Miranda who did the persuading, we can only imagine what fiery ecclesiastical arguments or promises the young Juana might have been facing. In giving Núñez de Miranda his due nod of recognition – “alumbrándome personas doctas” – she retreats into the protective rhetoric of humility, a counterpoint that effectively would have offset any reference, however obscure, to her tempestuous relationship with her confessor, or with the Church.

Antonio Alatorre, a regarded *sorjuanista*, supports belief that she vacillated about a religious vocation and highlights her mixed feelings about her confessor. Alatorre too finds it significant that in the *Respuesta* she does not mention Nuñez de Miranda by name but rather casts him as one of a group of anonymous people of learning: “Es notable cómo Sor Juana evita hacer público el nombre del P. Núñez, y lo pluraliza en personas doctas” (Alatorre 593).

A decade before the *Respuesta*, Sor Juana had fired the powerful Padre Núñez de Miranda as her confessor. It was a right all nuns had at the time, and she did not hesitate to make her feelings clear to him in what has come to be known as the *Carta de Monterrey*¹¹ – discovered in 1980 in Monterrey by a clergyman named Aureliano Tapia Méndez and purported to have been written in 1681 or 1682 from Sor Juana to Núñez de Miranda. It is a significant precursor, one that can be paralleled to the *Respuesta a sor Filotea*, given it is an outraged reaction to a comment by Núñez that, had he known she would write poetry, he would have married her off rather than guiding her into the convent.

Going beyond personal appeal, Sor Juana’s letter criticizes the narrow-mindedness and repressive authoritarianism, the un-Christian and unintelligent dogmatism of the whole imperial establishment . . . “Indeed, my most beloved Father,” she replies, “. . . what direct authority was yours, to dispose either of my person or my [free] will? (Arenal/Powell 26-27).

Its frank language marks it as a personal missive to her confessor, certainly not as a treatise intended for publication, and Arenal and Powell maintain that therein – in its

unconstrained composition – the *Carta de Monterrey* more than the *Respuesta* reveals the most genuine of Sor Juana’s feelings and beliefs.

Historians and social theorists alike concur that, given Sor Juana’s circumstances and her personal wants and needs, taking the veil was a choice of lesser evils, something she herself tells us she had to conquer by means of Divine favor. Arenal and Powell stress the historical reality that would have sent the young Juana running to the confines of a cloister: “A convent was the only place in her society where a woman could decently live alone and devote herself to learning” (3).

And Schons, writing in the very early part of the twentieth century about Sor Juana’s much-debated decision, admits a few people already at that time had begun to accept Sor Juana’s own explanation that she went to the convent to have a quiet place to read and study.

Schons also, in this statement – “It must be remembered that she was one of the most unusual personalities developed in the New World, and is hardly to be judged by ordinary standards” (142) – introduces another layer for analysis. Juana’s status in the New World was as a *criolla*, a woman caught between two worlds: Spain, the conqueror, and New Spain, the conquered. She was born of Spaniards, had Spanish blood. That was her nature. But she was raised in New Spain, into a mix of Spanish and indigenous cultures and religions. That was her nurturing. Thus, she was a woman locked in a gap, an oddity, an always already Other. Add to that her celebrated beauty, her prodigious intelligence and singleness of spirit, and Juana Ramírez y Asbaje constituted an appealing and fascinating freak show that eventually would have to be contained. Where better to contain her than in a convent, presumably a closed and controlled Church environment. The need for the Church to manipulate such prodigy would

explain Nuñez de Miranda's enthusiastic efforts to lure Juana away from the licentiousness of the viceregal Court, with which the Church already was at odds for its carnal excesses.

Schons sees no merit to any suggestion that Juana had a true religious calling, and draws on the *Respuesta* as the most solid indication of Juana's true intention:

According to her own confession, she had been, from the age of three, a most enthusiastic devotee of learning. She had devoured any and every book that came within her reach. At the age of fifteen she had already established a reputation as the most learned woman in Mexico. That she sought refuge in her books because of a broken heart is impossible. It was because of her learning that she gained a position at the viceregal court. Her books were her first love, and they were probably one of the reasons that impelled her to seek the seclusion of a cloister.

One looks in vain for a religious motive underlying this important step in her life. She even hesitated because she was afraid that convent life would interfere with her intellectual labors. (142-143)

Paz sees the convent decision not as a retreat to safety or solution, but rather as an act of psychological desperation and escape. In referring to her "masculinidad," he carefully disassociates his viewpoint on this issue from the "fantasía de algunos críticos"(159) who would say it was psychosomatic, but he does not in any way shy from the assertion of her "masculinidad" from a psychological, social and historic perspective.

Los valores de su mundo eran valores masculinos. Niña, quiso disfrazarse de hombre para apoderarse de ellos; mujer, extremó la división platónica entre el alma y el cuerpo para afirmar que la primera es neutral. El estado religioso fue la neutralización de su sexualidad corporal y la liberación y transmutación de su libido. . . . Impuesta por el mundo, ella la transformó en destino aceptado y aun elegido. . . . Se encerró en un convento no para rezar y cantar con sus hermanas sino para vivir a solas con ella misma. Se equivocó: cambió el bullicio del mundo por el del claustro. (Paz 159)

Paz's assessment reflects something Juana herself tells us in the *Respuesta*: "Pensé yo que huía de mí misma, pero, ¡miserable de mí! trájeme a mí conmigo y traje mi mayor enemigo en esta inclinación, que no sé determinar si por prenda o castigo me dio el Cielo . . ." (50). For Juana Ramírez y Asbaje, then, there would be no escape from worldly passion – but in this case, the passion was non-negotiable, and it was for learning.

Unwedded Bliss

Convent life may not have been Juana's first choice, but it seems to have been her only choice. She entered the Convento de San Jerónimo on February 21, 1669, and it would be her home for the next twenty-six years. Once inside the cloister walls, however, she continued in her own way to hold court. This was not a Discalced Carmelite house, and there was no oppressive Rule that would impose deprivation and austerity: "La vida de Sor Juana en el convento no fué de éxtasis y visiones ni de ascetismo exagerado. La clausura en los conventos de México en aquel tiempo no era muy extremada; si bien las monjas no salían, en cambio, el locutorio se

convertía, en determinados días y horas, en un centro de conversación amena, donde a veces se discutían sutilezas y puntos teológicos” (Urzaiz 15).

As Urzaiz and others who have studied Juana’s life tell us, she was not the sort of nun who was given to mysticism or self-flagellation, yet she did her duty and participated in the fabric of community life. That such participation at times chafed, cutting into the time she craved for reading, study and writing, she makes clear. Instead of teachers and lessons, she writes in the *Respuesta*, she had

muchos estorbos, no sólo los de mis religiosas obligaciones (que éstas ya se sabe cuán útil y provechosamente gastan el tiempo) sino de aquellas cosas accesorias de una comunidad: como estar yo leyendo y antojárseles en la celda vecina tocar y cantar; estar yo estudiando y pelear dos criadas y venirme a constituir juez de su pendencia; estar yo escribiendo y venir una amiga a visitarme, haciéndome muy mala obra con muy buena voluntad . . . y esto es continuamente, porque como los ratos que destino a mi studio son los que sobran de lo regular de la comunidad, esos mismos les sobran a las otras para venirme a estorbar; y solo saben cuánta verdad es ésta los que tienen experiencia de vida común . . . (58)

Hers is a typically frank assessment of her frustration, cautiously tempered by reassertions that any interruptions for religious obligation “usefully and beneficially take up one’s time” (trans., Arenal and Powell 40) that serve to offset any question that might arise about her religious commitment. Still, the frustration fairly crackles beneath her words, leaving little

doubt that she had no deep calling and no real care or need for what she considered frivolous communing with other women.

Paz says it is impossible to know if Juana had a genuine religious calling. Having left the Discalced Carmelite convent “arrepentida” only to enter the Convento de San Jerónimo a short time later, he says, she provides clues through her writings to her mental and emotional state: “Algunos de sus poemas revelan acedia, angustia, desgano pero ¿no encontramos lo mismo en la obra de otros poetas que vivieron en el mundo? Se quejó de las impertinencias de sus compañeras de encierro, “¿no habría estado expuesta a más intolerables intromisiones si se hubiese quedado en la corte? ...No obstante, debe haber tenido momentos de duda y desfallecimiento. Más de una vez debe haber lamentado estar atada a una resolución irrevocable” (160).

He turns to one of her sonnets as being the best indication of her state of mind. “El título describe muy bien el caracter terrible, por ser inapelable, de decisiones como la suya: *Encarece de animosidad la elección de estado durable hasta la muerte.*”¹² The work is Juana’s *Primero Sueño*, with its theme of lost glory symbolized in the figure of Phaeton. “Con lucidez y melancolía la poetisa encarece el ánimo que la hizo elegir un estado que no cesa sino al llegar la muerte” (161), he says, and as support, offers this passage of the *Primero Sueño*:

Si los riesgos del mar considerara,
ninguno se embarcara; si antes viera
bien su peligro, nadie se atreviera
ni al bravo toro osado provocara.

Si del fogoso bruto ponderara

la furia, desbocada en la carrera
el jinete prudente, nunca hubiera
quien con discreta mano lo enfrenara.

Pero si hubiera alguno tan osado
que, no obstante el peligro, al mismo Apolo
quisiese gobernar con atrevida
mano el rápido carro en luz bañado,
Todo lo hiciera, y no tomara solo
estado que ha de ser toda la vida. (Sor Juana, cited in Paz 161)

Lavrin, too, in “Unlike Sor Juana? The Model Nun in the Religious Literature of Colonial Mexico,” poses the question, “Was Sor Juana a typical or an atypical nun?” (79).

She was both at different times in her life. She did not seem to have had an overpowering vocation for religious life, but she was a dutiful nun who complied with the daily routine, performed the conventual assignments to which she was appointed, obeyed her superiors, and befriended her sisters in religion. She was not typical insofar as she failed to engage in the practice of the ascetic rigors that seemed to have been so common among certain orders.” (80)

Again, Lavrin, in seeking to situate Sor Juana in the world of the seventeenth century

convent as “typical” or “atypical,” goes on to repeat that in her final years, “she seemed to have lived as the typical nun of religious literature, in a self-holocaust of humility and penitence” (80). However, the only documentation we have of this ‘self-holocaust’ are from Church-written and Church-disseminated sources (like Calleja’s *Vida*) which consistently and unapologetically cross the line into hagiography. As a propaganda vehicle of substantial proportion, refocusing the earthly reality of Sor Juana’s work would have been critical, likely intended to avoid apologia and set the stage for any possible move for canonization.

However, as we have seen, biographer Paz debunks Calleja’s highly homogenized narrative of a saintly Sor Juana, as well as Pfandl’s misogynistic psychological explanation that narcissism explained much of her “masculine” tendencies that can indeed be explained from a variety of other theoretical standpoints, “desde el punto de vista psicológico, social e histórico. Los valores de su mundo eran valores masculinos.” (Paz 159) He does nothing, however, to abandon his own insistence on shining a weak and flickering flashlight into her psyche.

Paz’s now outdated reading opens the door for newer, more modern argumentation, and Verónica Grossi, a *sorjuanista* whose 2007 book *Sigilosos V(u)elos Epistemológicos en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* offers us a much more current reading. She takes issue with Paz’s characterization of the nun as a narcissist: “Paz no abandona el modelo psicoanalítico de Ludwig Pfandl, quien describió a Sor Juana como una ‘neurótica, en la que predominan fuertes tendencias masculinas’” (20), and cites new lines of investigation sustained by historical and feminist studies that distance themselves from psychoanalysis. Calling on historicists and feminists like Electa Arenal, Merrim, Rosa Perelmuter, Georgina Sabat de Rivers, and Elías Trabulse among others, Grossi believes Sor Juana’s work:

no escenifica la renuncia, el fracaso, la capitulación ante el poder, el silenciamiento, la enfermedad y la muerte sino la afirmación del poder intelectual y político de la mujer; en particular, su derecho inalienable al conocimiento, a la interpretación y la participación a la sociedad. (20-21)

Talking Back

Good woman or bad, saint or sinner, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was never canonized. Clearly, she was not a mystic and had never claimed any potential for Divine intercession. She claimed no bilocations, no levitations, no miraculous cures. Yet, if we strip away the Catholic Church's posthumous, highly controlled discourse, we do find a focus redirected by Sor Juana herself from the "bad" woman's rebellion to a "model" nun's superior intellect appropriately utilized to bring glory to God. Her devotional exercises and religious poetry, along with the fervor of her knowledge of and arguments about Holy Scriptures, are evidence enough of Sor Juana's religious inclination. But in intellectualizing the heavens, in searching for academic logic in matters of divine faith, Sor Juana repeatedly crossed the lines drawn by the men of the Church at that time. In order to continue to be heard, she would have to find a way to use words – the very tool that created her problems to begin with – to circumvent patriarchal disapproval.

Many of her works of earthly focus had been published and preserved thanks to the efforts of her friend and protector – and some claim, her lover – the Vicereine Maria Luisa, Condesa de Paredes, and in those works shine the quick, sometimes acerbic wit couched in clever and charming rhetorics; the flashing temper of rebellion steeped in false humility; the impassioned and unrelenting scientific curiosity she could not always successfully reconcile with ecclesiastical concerns. Therein emerged the atypical nun, the bad girl who knew how to

make her point and who felt compelled to talk back, but who (usually) tried not to be too obvious about it.

Still, Sor Juana by her very nature was confrontational and often controversial. Charm and beauty only went so far with Church fathers and held no footing at all with one of the most powerful leaders of the Church in New Spain, Bishop Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, who saw Juana's works as impertinent, disrespectful and ultimately, dangerous. Thomas M. Cohen, in *The Fire of Tongues: Antônio Vieira and the Missionary Church in Brazil and Portugal*, provides a concise account of the political and theological polemics within the Church at that time (based in great part on the research and theories of Dario Puccini and Octavio Paz), and in what is believed to have been a power struggle between Church titans, we find the seeds of Sor Juana's troubles with Aguiar y Seijas: "Two unauthorized volumes of Vieira's sermon appeared in Madrid in 1675 and 1678 . . . dedicated by the publisher to Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, a well-known patron of the Jesuits in Mexico, who at the time was Bishop of Michoacán and was competing with the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, to become archbishop of Mexico" (Cohen 87).

In the midst of this all-too-earthly, politically motivated power grab, Sor Juana obeyed her friend, the Bishop of Puebla, when he asked her to put down in writing the criticisms she had voiced of Vieira's views on the Maundy Thursday liturgy and the ritual of the *pedilavium* (Jesus' washing the feet of the Apostles, particularly Judas, as the absolute altruism and gift of love, or *fineza*). "Vieira's interpretation of the *pedilavium* in the 1650 sermon focuses on Jesus' humanity. Sor Juana's *Carta [atenagórica]*, in contrast, focuses on Jesus' divinity. The difference is crucial, because it explains the pastoral purposes of the sermon that the *Carta* ignores" (Cohen 88). Paz reminds us that it is significant that Vieira, the source of the polemic,

was not without controversy himself: “el Padre Vieyra refuta las opiniones de tres santos – Agustín, Tomás de Aquino y Juan Crisóstomo – sobre las finezas de Cristo en sus últimos días” (514).¹³

In obeying the bishop, Sor Juana specifically asked that her written words (in what would come to be titled the *Carta atenagórica*) not be published. Her request was ignored, and when the letter was published in November 1690, Juana effectively was condemned by Fernández de Santa Cruz to a future of confrontation. We do not know if Fernández de Santa Cruz acted intentionally to have Juana censured or whether it was merely a self-centered act to utilize an argument superior to his own and trump his rival, but in publishing Juana’s *Carta atenagórica* against her wishes, the betrayal was only just beginning. Motives aside, it set off a storm of recrimination and repercussion for Sor Juana: “The *Carta atenagórica* was a byproduct of this struggle [between Aguiar y Seijas and Fernández de Santa Cruz] . . . By writing about Vieira (who was never made aware of the letter) Sor Juana indirectly was attacking Vieira and his powerful Jesuit friends” (Cohen 87).

Yet Cohen believes Sor Juana was not a simple victim in writing the *Carta atenagórica*, nor was she Fernández de Santa Cruz’s blindly unwitting pawn:

She had her own reasons for attacking Aguiar y Seijas, a well-known misogynist. Sor Juana apologizes that the criticisms of Vieira were penned by a woman (“a sex that is so discredited in the field of letters”), but concludes that she, “a poor woman,” is God’s chosen instrument for punishing Vieira – and Aguiar y Seijas – for their pride (87).

And so it began. It had not been enough simply to publish the *Carta atenagórica*. Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz had felt it necessary to affix an introductory letter of censure, known now as the *Carta de Sor Filotea*,¹⁴ to Juana's work from the pseudonymous "Sor Filotea de la Cruz," the Bishop of Puebla himself.

Señora mía: He visto la carta de V. md. en que impugna las finezas de Cristo que discurrió el Reverendo Padre Antonio de Vieira en el Sermón del Mandato con tal sutileza que a los más eruditos ha parecido que, como otra Águila del Apocalipsis, se había remontado este singular talento sobre sí mismo . . . pero a mi juicio, quien leyere su apología de V. md. no podrá negar que cortó la pluma más delgada que ambos y que pudieran gloriarse de verse impugnados de una mujer que es honra de su sexo. (SJICP)

Append to such insult the following exhortation to follow the lead of writing saints like the adored and mystical Saint Teresa, not just in style but in content as well: "No es mi juicio tan austero censor que esté mal con los versos – en que V. md. se ha visto tan celebrada –, después que Santa Teresa, el Nacienceno y otros santos canonizaron con los suyos esta habilidad; pero deseara que les imitara, así como en el metro, también en la elección de los asuntos" (SJICP).

Like a mouse attempting to tame a lion, Sor Filotea carefully clarifies that (s)he does not wish to deny women the use of letters, "pues tantas se aplicaron a este estudio, no sin alabanza de San Jerónimo," but (s)he must have forgotten the immensity of the lion's nature in following through with the argument:

Es verdad que dice San Pablo que las mujeres no enseñen; pero no manda que las mujeres no estudien para saber; porque sólo quiso prevenir el riesgo de elación en nuestro sexo, propenso siempre a la vanidad. A Sarai la quitó una letra la Sabiduría Divina, y puso una más al nombre de Abram, no porque el varón ha de tener más letras que la mujer, como sienten muchos, sino porque la i añadida al nombre de Sara explicaba temor y dominación. Señora mía se interpreta Sarai; y no convenía que fuese en la casa de Abraham señora la que tenía empleo de súbdita. Letras que engendran elación, no las quiere Dios en la mujer . . . (SJICP)

Unraveling the bishop's motives is yet another game of conjecture. Was he hoping to protect Sor Juana, even as he betrayed her? Had he himself been coerced by more powerful Church leaders than he to publish the *Carta atenagórica* in order to publicly humiliate and silence the still popular Sor Juana? Was the Inquisition at play in what, for all appearances, was the blatant betrayal of a friend? One of the final passages of the *Carta de Sor Filotea* certainly seems to be more poignant than the rhetorical apologia of the time:

Esto desea a V. md. quien, desde que la besó, muchos años ha, la mano, vive enamorada de su alma, sin que se haya entibiado este amor con la distancia ni el tiempo; porque el amor espiritual no padece achaques de mudanza, ni le reconoce el que es puro si no es hacia el crecimiento. Su Majestad oiga mis súplicas y haga a V. md. muy santa, y me la guarde en toda prosperidad. (SJICP)

Conventional rhetoric? Genuine balm? Frightened warning? Or perhaps, all three? Whatever the intention, Sor Juana simmered for three months. It was a long time to gather steam, or perhaps to calm herself sufficiently to respond with the caution obviously needed. That response, of course, is the simultaneously infamous and famous *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, part autobiography and part legal defense, a brilliantly composed yet impassioned treatise on the rights of women to think and learn as men do. It has been hailed in recent decades as a feminist manifesto, but we know from her own words that she wished to neutralize gender and believed that, in intellect, gender had no place. The *Respuesta* was soul on parchment, the end product of an intellectual *camera obscura* that observed, processed with light and recorded for posterity the *inteligencia* of one extraordinary woman.

Undeniably, the *Carta atenagórica* had set off a firestorm of ecclesiastical outrage, and the *Respuesta* did absolutely nothing to quench the Church's flames. That Sor Juana responded at all, given the looming and potentially fatal censure of the Spanish Inquisition, is a testament to the emotion roiling within her. She had never been still or silent before, and this circumstance would be no different. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's reaction to the *Carta de Sor Filotea*, however carefully crafted, was complexly performative, a habit long practiced and repeated until it was cemented within her. It was a subjective response to an intensely personal attack on the very core of her being, and it could not go unanswered. She would talk back yet again, but this time, the results would yield more severe, long-lasting sanction. Rather than remaining silent or devoting herself to more appropriate devotional writings, as "Sor Filotea" had suggested, Juana perhaps naively fell back on what she knew – her knowledge and her intellect – to craft what someday (but certainly not in her own time) would be hailed as a brilliantly logical argument for women's

rights. But if she had thought logic and sound argumentation would shake the Church's phallogocentric patriarchs from their mutually supportive pillars of ego and self-interest, she had miscalculated – and tragically, at that. In one of the greatest ironies in Sor Juana's life, the *Respuesta*, for all the controversy it engendered, was never published while she was alive. Still, Church leaders were outraged once again and the possibility for what they hoped would be her demise loomed darkly across the New Spanish landscape.

Then, Silence. Really?

In 1691, the skies opened and rains and flooding destroyed crops in and around Mexico City. Famine, panic and racial unrest and insurrection followed, tearing apart with chaos the carefully colonized fabric of New Spanish life in the area: “El tumulto de 1692 – el más grave entre todos los que sufrió la ciudad de México durante el régimen virreinal – fue la expresión de una profunda crisis histórica que abarcaba al cuerpo social y a las instituciones tanto como a la cultura superior” (Paz 573). The devastation brought about the fall of the viceroy, Gaspar de Sandoval Cerda Silva y Mendoza, Conde de Galve – Juana's patron and staunch champion – and in a brilliant and strategic political gambit, the Catholic Church in the form of Aguiar y Seijas, now archbishop and the most powerful clergyman in New Spain, moved to restore the order that a weak and indecisive government had failed to bring about. According to Paz, “la Iglesia se convirtió en el sostén de las instituciones”:

De este modo un acontecimiento público que nadie había previsto cambió radicalmente y para siempre la vida privada de Juana Inés. Las lluvias excesivas, el chahuixtle,¹⁵ la mala administración y un motín trastornaron

inesperadamente el edificio que ella habia construido con habilidad y paciencia durante veinte años. (574)

In the midst of the turmoil of 1692, the Crown recalled Galve and his wife, the Vicereine María Elvira de Toledo, Condesa de Galve, and when they sailed for Spain they took with them whatever by that time meager protection they could offer Sor Juana, their friend. That same year there was yet another blow for Juana, the most “brutal” of all, according to Paz – the death in Spain of her longtime friend and defender, the former viceroy in New Spain, Tomás de la Cerda, Marqués de la Laguna. Even before his death, Paz tells us, Juana had been left “sin amigos ni valedores en Nueva España” (574). She had lost not just her political protection, but also the privileged position that afforded her a relatively free pen and a personal voice. It was all Aguiar y Seijas could have wanted in his quest to control the upstart nun who had dared challenge male theologians.

Here, the haze begins to fall in earnest over Juana’s life. For all appearances, the changes had begun – including the uncharacteristic withdrawal from life and letters, the purported conversion to God’s path and renunciation of worldly learning – and the gaps in her life story increase.

If we return to Padre Calleja’s account of circumstances in the *Vida* as the most immediate after her death – albeit the most manipulated and cleansed with religious fervor – we have a glimpse at her relationship with her books and her library and by extension perceive her thirst for knowledge. But Calleja also gives us a version of the dismantling of her library in 1693, one that, yet again, met with the approval of Church authorities:

. . . su quitapesares era su librería, donde se entraba a consolar con cuatro mil amigos, que tantos eran los libros de que la compuso, casi sin costa, porque no había quien imprimiese, que no la contribuyese uno, como a la fe de erratas.

Estas disposiciones de natural tan limpio y compuesto halló el año de 1693 la divina gracia de Dios, para hacer en el corazón de la madre Juana su morada de asiento.

Entró ella en cuentas consigo, y halló que la paga solo puntual en la observancia de la ley que había buenamente procurado hasta entonces hacerle a Dios, no era generosa satisfacción a tantas mercedes divinas de que se reconocía adeudada; con que trató de no errar para en adelante los motivos de buena, de excusar lo lícito y empezar las obras de su perogación, con tal cuidado, como si fueran de precepto. (36-37)

If we give historical credence to Calleja's account, it is certainly harder to accept, much less understand, Juana's sudden and unequivocal metamorphosis from sinner to saint because that same year, in a surprising and uncharacteristic move, she signs a general confession, and asks Núñez de Miranda to return to her as her spiritual advisor.

Paz believes she acted out of loneliness and fear, and cites the work of both Calleja and Juan de Oviedo, the priest who wrote the biography of the high-profile Núñez de Miranda, as historical corroboration of Juana's codependent, often tempestuous relationship with her celebrated confessor: "El mismo Oviedo refiere que, desde que conoció a Juana Inés, el padre Núñez había mostrado celo por su caso. Ese celo fue tan extremado, y las relaciones entre la

monja jerónima y el jesuita tan prolongadas y complejas, que Oviedo dedica a describirlas un capítulo entero de su biografía de Núñez” (155).

Paz believes Oviedo’s biography is an attempt to “cleanse” Núñez de Miranda of any blame that may have been attributed to him in his treatment of Sor Juana, “entre ellas el excesivo rigor con que la trató y que lo llevó hasta prohibirle el ejercicio de la poesía y el cultivo de las letras. En cambio, Oviedo acusa a sor Juana de ingrata, engreída e indómita. El tono polémico de estos pasajes es revelador y muestra que ya desde entonces se hablaba de las persecuciones que ensombrecieron los últimos años de sor Juana” (155).

As the civil unrest continued and the fabric of Sor Juana’s carefully constructed solitude-that-was-not-solitude unraveled, Paz believes, the nun’s fear spurred her metamorphosis: “El tumulto de 1692, al dejarla sola, la enfrentó con su imagen.” So, according to Paz, when Juana looked in the mirror and no longer liked what she saw in herself, she turned to the seductively familiar fervor of the hellfire-preaching, self-mortifying, morally incorruptible Jesuit, Núñez de Miranda, who had first lured her to the convent. She was, Paz maintains, “[e]ntre lúcida y desesperada” (581). He again calls on Oviedo as proof of Juana’s abrupt about face:

Movida del cielo y avergonzada de sí misma por no haber correspondido como debiera a las mercedes divinas, envió a llamar a su antiguo padre . . . resistióse éste una y otra vez, o porque no discurría el fin para el que lo llamaba o porque temía alguna veleidad en mutación tan repentina o, lo que es más probable, por avivarle más los deseos con la detención. Al fin, con consulta y parecer del padre rector, hubo de ir . . . (Oviedo, cited in Paz 579)

Within a seventeenth century, Inquisitional context, we might read the phrase “por avivarle más los deseos con la detención” as an offer of cautious and justified spiritual guidance, and Oviedo adheres predictably to the Catholic Church’s discourse of the time. As historians now remind us, “For a Jesuit of that century, the combination of so many felicitous virtues in a woman was not a mistake of nature but a challenge to the church” (Lavrin 67). But given a more modern reading, admittedly one carried out with the clarity of research and retrospect, our reading shifts to recognize smug manipulation and perhaps veiled threat from a man of agency who is exacting revenge as a sacrifice to what he believes is his moral and religious superiority over the flawed and inferior female.

On March 5, 1694, Sor Juana wrote her *profesión de fe* – a reenactment of her 1669 profession of faith upon first entering the convent – which she signed in her own blood and in which she repents her sins and renounces all worldly studies – notably, in third-person rhetoric: “Protesta que, rubricada con su sangre, hizo de su fe y amor a Dios la madre Juana Inés de la Cruz, al tiempo de abandonar los estudios humanos para proseguir, desembarazada de este afecto, en el camino de la perfección” (Sor Juana, cited in Paz 596).

Once again Juana was under the ecclesiastical thumb of Núñez de Miranda, but it would prove to be a brief spiritual reunion: The confessor died on February 17, 1695. Juana would die just two months later, on April 17, 1695. Calleja tells us that an epidemic made its way into the convent, a disease so virulent and contagious that only one of every ten nuns infected survived.

La Madre Juana, de natural muy compasiva y caritativa de celo que asistía a todas, sin fatigarse de la continuidad ni recelarse de la cercanía. Decirla

entonces (como tantos se lo aconsejaban) que siquiera no se acercase a las muy dolientes, era vestirla alas de abeja, para hacerla huír de la flores.

Enfermó al fin, y al punto que se reconoció su peligro, se llenó convento y ciudad de plegarias y víctimas por su salud; solo ella estaba conforme con la esperanza de su muerte que todos temían. (41-42)

Calleja's narrative purifies Juana in the hours before her death, a crucial preparation for justifying her admittance into heaven, much as the negation of her illegitimacy had been pivotal for her acceptance into the convent. In his final lines, Paz, too, performs a feat of purification:

La fê y las creencias de sor Juana fueron cómplices de su derrota. Regaló sus libros a su persecutor, castigó su cuerpo, humilló su inteligencia y renunció a su don más suyo: la palabra. El sacrificio en al altar de Cristo fue un acto de sumisión ante prelados soberbios. En sus convicciones religiosas encontró una justificación de su abjuración intelectual: los poderes que la destrozaron fueron los mismos que ella había servido y alabado. (608)

Adhering to the popular discourse that Juana's final years, even her last hours, were a willing capitulation to God and the Church, Paz, like numerous other of Sor Juana's biographers and theorists of the early- to mid-twentieth century, believes this strangely uncharacteristic metamorphosis was her way of repenting, of justifying this final denial of her intellect, indeed, of

her essence. If we buy into that theory, Juana believed she was broken, and thereby, her soul was saved.

Making sense of h(er)story

So, what does it all mean? Are we to believe that this brilliant, vibrant woman was at long last mutely submissive to the mandates of the men who abused and betrayed her? As Arenal and Powell point out, she was manipulated by a triumvirate of male Church authorities, specifically by Núñez de Miranda as her confessor, Fernández de Santa Cruz as her friend and admirer, and Aguiar y Seijas as her archbishop and highest spiritual father on earth. “These three ecclesiastics wanted Sor Juana to stop thinking and writing with the latitude she had exercised. She was warned to be more like the other women in the convents of Spanish America, who were supposed to serve as both subjects and agents of a regime undertaking massive imperialist endeavors. That is, nuns were to be subjects of the Spanish church and crown; to serve as agents of the church’s mission to Christianize heathens; to guard orthodoxy; and to ensure social obeisance” (Arenal/Powell 5-6).

Given the patriarchal structure of her time and society, it is perhaps the greatest of ironies that today, long after they lived, we speak of Núñez de Miranda, Fernández de Santa Cruz, and Aguiar y Seijas intertextually, most specifically (and almost only) when we study Sor Juana. During her life, she cemented herself into their histories and made herself an intrinsic part of their seventeenth century identities. Even Margo Glantz, who offers one of the most traditional twentieth century readings of Paz’s work on Sor Juana, ultimately admits that the nun has altered him, as well, telling us that Sor Juana has made herself a part of Paz’s construct: “Paz has written her back in history and in literature through a sacrificial act in which her whole being belongs to

him: He has labeled her silence. Who would dare to talk about Sor Juana today without referring to him?" (137). Glantz completely misses the role reversal in that statement because, force of the patriarchal gaze notwithstanding, Sor Juana has reversed the binary and more than three centuries after her death, the strength of her voice and intellect continues to deconstruct male dominion and female submission to it. She continues to speak.

Lacunae

One important note about Sor Juana's production: Because the library and archives at the Convento de San Jerónimo were all but demolished in the mid-nineteenth century, it is impossible to know if what we today are perceiving as silence-as-absence was indeed constituted by a lack of written production, or if we simply are missing texts and correspondences that would have completed Sor Juana's *corpus*. Paz tells us that the convent had no historian, as other convents did, though the nuns over the course of many decades kept extensive records and logs of daily activities; it also had a library that "probably" was extensive and contained rare and valuable tomes. However, Benito Juárez in the mid- to late-1850s enacted the liberal party's Laws of Reform against religious orders, which included the breaking up and dispersal of the libraries and historically critical archives of all Mexican convents.

Para tener una idea lo que significan esa dispersión y esa pérdida, basta con recordar que esas bibliotecas y archivos eran los más ricos de Nueva España. La Reforma liberal destruyó una parte preciosa de la historia de México; contribuyó así, decisivamente, en el proceso de automutilación que nos ha convertido en un pueblo sin memoria. Lo que no se perdió

para siempre salió del país y forma parte ahora de las colecciones de las bibliotecas y archivos norteamericanos. Los papeles de San Jerónimo no escaparon a la suerte general. Muchos desaparecieron, otros fueron adquiridos por bibliotecas y eruditos de afuera . . . (Paz 175)

This possibility for incompleteness constitutes an immense lacuna in our attempts to read or understand Sor Juana's silences. Janis Stout in *Strategies of Reticence* says "the assumption is that something used to be there, and the effort is to find or convincingly recreate what is missing. The standard remains one of completeness or fullness. The lacunae or emptinesses of damaged or maltransmitted texts are unintended silences. They exist because some outer force – time or fire or offended righteousness – did violence to the author's intention, which was an intention of fullness" (3). Kirk reminds us that "men – who controlled access to official discourses – were not all that keen to acknowledge female alliances and other manifestations of community, let alone memorialize them in formal written records. . . . Women were only to achieve political authority under the strict supervision of the (male) Church hierarchy." (11). That women still found ways to achieve production in such a limiting time-space clearly undermines the jealously guarded authority of the Church hierarchy and cracks the illusory structure of the gender binary.

Because this lacuna does exist in Sor Juana's body of work, our research must operate within the strictures of the documents we actually do have that help lead us to a fuller understanding of how she lived and worked. Based on such a limitation, it is important to proceed with caution, especially for those who still choose to believe that there was a great metamorphosis into capitulatory silence and theological subjugation as Sor Juana neared the end of her life.

CHAPTER II

SOR JUANA'S STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL:

SILENCE, PERFORMANCE, RESISTANCE

*When you don't put your tongue in your pocket,
there's always a gramma-r to censure it.*

Helene Cixous, *Coming to Writing*

In order to approach the specifics of Sor Juana's life and work theoretically, it is important first to understand the elements that contributed to her endurance. I believe the three most pivotal factors in her subject construction were silence, performance and resistance, and maintain that together they provide a fusion of politics and strategy that allowed her to circumvent the patriarchal chokehold that threatened to strip her of the uniqueness of her voice and identity. The Church's attempts to direct her away from writing about what she wished to write and to convince her to create what her ecclesiastical fathers believed was appropriate within religious discourse was yet another, hardly more subtle, method of silencing, constituting an insidious attempt to bring about the deprivation of her voice. It was a means of control she was able to circumvent and resist by writing both ecclesiastical and secular works, and tempering those secular works with clever rhetorics and wordplay.

Sor Juana was hardly alone in utilizing special rhetorics and literary strategies (including Josefina Ludmer's "tricks of the weak"). Other writing women around the world during Juana's time – Aphra Behn and Lady Mary Chudleigh in England, Anne Bradstreet in

New England, Cecilia Ferrazzi in Venice, to name just a few (Ockerbloom) – developed methods to carve out a space in which to be heard:

In a culture where words are formed and assigned their dominant associations by men, women, in order to speak at all, must either subvert their own speech by using the patriarchal tongue or else seek for themselves experiences available only to women – what it means to be a daughter, the emotions of a lesbian relationship, the process of childbirth – experiences which would then serve to free the woman poet through her choice of subject from the history of patriarchal associations. (Diehl 533)

For Sor Juana, who utilized the patriarchal tongue and for the most part eschewed the experiences relegated to what was considered conventional and acceptable feminine experience, such freedom would come at great cost. Throughout her life, the social, economic, religious and political discourses that had acted as powerful purveyors of silence eventually converged, forcing from her a performative, explosive resistance that has reverberated for centuries. Karen Barad in “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” approaches the notion of discourse with a note of caution. In offering “a materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist elaboration of performativity” (803), she is able to challenge the Canonical interpretation of formal discourse (especially one as monolithic as that of the Catholic Church). “To think of discourse as mere spoken or written words forming descriptive statements is to enact the mistake of representationalist thinking. Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices

define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities” (819).

Her premise refutes the long-accepted classical discourse on silence, carried through in George Steiner’s 1958 work, *Language and Silence*, which upholds silence as lack and elevates embodied speech to the dominant position at the top of the binary: “That articulate speech should be the line dividing man from the myriad forms of animate being, that speech should define man’s singular eminence above the silence of the plant and the grunt of the beast . . . is classic doctrine well before Aristotle. . . . Possessed of speech, possessed by it, the word having chosen the grossness and infirmity of man’s condition for its own compelling life, the human person has broken free from the great silence of matter” (36). Barad refutes that within silence, not necessarily in utterance or word, can hover the path to freedom.

Education researcher Lisa Mazzei, too, rejects the notion of silence as embodied: “The tradition of silence as being, as presence, as spoken, is long in the context of philosophy, art, literature, poetry and music. . . . My theorizing of silence is an attempt to demonstrate how silence speaks through the concrete of the spoken in our transcripts and conversations. I do this in search of a silent discourse whose haunting of the ‘text’ has many stories to tell and secrets to unravel” (30).

Given the field of possibilities Barad and Mazzei have suggested, the type of popular discourse (such as that of the Catholic Church) once believed to define Sor Juana’s life and work is wide open for challenge, leaving modern readers better able to identify the bodily constraints her time-space placed upon her and the ways in which she would have broken free

of Steiner's "great silence of matter" itself. Specifically, Sor Juana used strategic silences to fight back, maintaining her voice and perpetuating the construction of her identity.

A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. (Barad 802)

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler offers up gender as a "doing": "gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (112). Sor Juana's "doing," her construction, is found, then, not in the discourses that attempted to define her in life and even posthumously, but rather in her unceasing quest for learning and knowledge, in the relentless repetition of acts that brought forth words, and in her silences, the interstices wherein metamorphosis and utterance occur. It is those gaps, the spaces between thoughts and words and actions, which provide the transitional, internal space for resistance and eventual change, edging out a reality imposed from without by the self-serving discourses of Church or State. It is within just such a performative silence – familiar, internal and reiterative – that Sor Juana as she neared the end of her life continued to construct the script of her subjectivity. She resisted the external press of censure and survived by utilizing the tricks of the weak, those weapons of resistance she had repeated by "doing" so often throughout her life and career. In the appearance of capitulation

lay the path to embodied freedom. What fermented in her heart and mind, even the fires of the Inquisition could not touch. Even in silence, Sor Juana knew, there lay a path to the resistance of patriarchal control.

The Silence that Isn't

To explore that path, it is important to consider all the possibilities of what we have come to think of as silence.

When you think of silence, what do you imagine? Understandably, most of us immediately conjure complete quiet, an actual lack of sound. But to understand Sor Juana, we should understand silence as so much more, as a tool that most often acted as a strategy in life and writing. As Anne Ruggles Gere maintains, “Instead of seeing silence as speech’s opposite, we can conceive of it as a part of speech, located on a continuum that puts one in dialogue with the other.” (206)

Thus, silence is both absence and presence, both negative and positive. It can be a lack, a presence and, I believe most importantly, an interstitial space in which meaning yields to utterance and provides a path to change. It can speak, or say nothing. It is tool and weapon, agent of peace and purveyor of battle. It is the harbinger of the word or language’s foil. Silences can be breaths, pauses, musical interludes, the spaces between written or spoken words that give meaning and sense to language, or the inane utterances of incoherence. Silence can be a meaningful hesitation, or a blank stare, censorship or withholding, imposition or withdrawal. It can be angry denial or lingering caress. It can signal surrender, or it can signal resistance.

Some anthropologists and theorists maintain that silence is social and that for it to exist

there must be a recipient, a theory perhaps best left to Derrida for unraveling. But the most modern and practical theory about this complex absence-that-is-presence – which interestingly enough establishes its own binary hierarchy even as it deconstructs it – is that silences are performative resistances and can be planned, or they can be spontaneous strategies used by subordinated groups or individuals to chisel out a time-space in which subject construction from within can supercede object construction imposed from without. Carmen Luke tells us that public silences by women have been interpreted by some feminists as negative spaces that represent “subjugated social status,” but that voice is seen as a positive space of empowerment. “What the literature has largely overlooked is the use of silence as a politics of resistance; in Foucauldian terms, the use of silence can be read as a refusal to ‘confess’ and to ‘expose’ the self” (213). For Sor Juana, using silence when her life and work both had been spotlighted by the strength of her voice would have been one means of negotiating the public arena Luke speaks of, and it would have allowed her to reenact the learning strategies she had performed since childhood. Juana’s silence was a performative means of communication on the way to or in the absence of actual utterance. Through silence, she could proffer distance and coherence, show anger or displeasure, indicate resistance or rebellion, protect, avoid or punctuate.

As a strategy, silence can be actively utilized or it can simply appear in a broad range of circumstances and for countless reasons. As a tool for communication, it can be used to say what cannot or should not be said -- again, what Paz refers to as “lo que no se puede decir.” When I’m angry with my spouse, he doesn’t worry until I stop talking, either to him or about the matter at hand. My withdrawal is the danger signal. My silence, then, is tool, weapon, word(s), presence, resistance, manipulation, control – and strategy.

Silence also protects me – from saying too much, from hurting my spouse, from going too far, from venturing into territory that could yield long-term damage. It is the interstice that allows rational thought to surface and intervene. Such furious silence is highly layered, complex communication – conscious and subconscious, emotional yet clever. It goes where I cannot / will not go. It conveys my meaning without the damaging details and consequences. It is the alternative strategy for what cannot or should not be said.

For historically subordinated groups, specifically women and colonized cultures, “silence” ranks as a clever “trick of the weak” indeed and plays an active role in the politics of resistance. But for a deeper, more complete understanding of how the subaltern clears a path for communication and subject construction, we have to consider silence, as well as speech, as co-embodied.

Silence and speech are often defined in relation to each other [...] speech enjoys primacy in this dichotomy, with silence negatively perceived as a lack of speech. As a consequence of this binary thinking, scholars remain unable to study the full range of the meanings and uses of silence in human interactions . . . If silence is . . . as like speech as it is different, perhaps silence, too, can be a gesture. Rather than simply a background for expressed thought, if we considered silence to be embodied, to be a mating of the phenomenal and existential bodies, how might that affect the current misconceptions of silence and subsequent limitations on the study of communicative silences? (Acheson 2)

Luke in 1994 published “Women in the Academy: The Politics of Speech and Silence,” an important work on feminist pedagogy that explores the “real and symbolic silencing of women” (211) and its effects on their interactions within the community of learning. It has taken historians, theorists and anthropologists, among others, to unravel the dynamics of silence and silencing, she says, and maintains that feminist scholars rightly have followed French philosopher Michel Foucault in their groundbreaking attempts to become “archeologists of discourse” (214). “Silence as resistant positive affirmation of identity, or being silenced by feeling threatened or guilty as a consequence of particular subject positions in relation and listening to an other, are complex power/knowledge relations for which simple prescriptions for empowerment through voice do not account.” (222)

Luke warns that to read feminine silences as simple indicators of passiveness or as a lack of power positioning would be a critical error:

Rather, cross-cultural evidence suggests that women use silence in politically strategic ways to subvert and resist male social and linguistic power . . . women’s use of ‘gossip’, poetry, and song, gesture and ritual, and even bilingual diglossia are socio-cultural practices used to subvert and context dominant usually male, discourse . . . there may be far more deliberate and purposive uses of silence then (sic) are taken into account in models of critical pedagogy . . . further, women’s silence in social anthropological accounts has much to do with their refusal to reveal themselves to the (usually male, almost always Euro-American) anthropologist’s gaze (214).

Certainly, Luke's theory is highly applicable to sorjuanine studies. In the nun's life and work we clearly see the political wordplay, the subversion of male authority and the resistance to patriarchal efforts to control her intellectual output, and her body of work offers proof of her use of poetry, song, gesture and ritual. We see as well the bilingual diglossia in her use of Nahuatl words learned in the multicultural community in which she was raised, and in her facility with Latin and her propensity to proffer it in her writing as proof of her learning. And we certainly see the creative use of silence, used as a mask of humility and submission in order to turn away the anthropologist's gaze. In Juana's case, however, she was turning from the patriarchal gaze of the Church fathers – including the ferocious gaze of the Inquisition.

In Literature

Aside from the practical semiotics of interstitial pauses or protracted absences of “sound” (signs), silence can and does have a direct impact on literature, in broad terms, in two ways: First, the writer is the victim or recipient of personal silences, or the writer is the controller or donor of personal silences; and, the writer utilizes silences within her / his work, either as stylistic strategy (playing with form, rhythm, punctuation, etc.), or as contextual components of the written work.

Silence enjoys a long and central tradition in literature, one that has been rigorously studied within the past and current centuries. Scholars have used it to penetrate the hidden meanings and motives of, to name a paltry few, Jane Austen, Samuel Beckett, William Shakespeare, Henry Miller, Virginia Woolf and, relatively recently, Sor Juana herself. Within literature, silence carries with it the added burden of rhetoric: It must have a form of some sort,

which in turn is perforce functional; it must ACT as a something in order to DO something. In literature, it cannot by its very nature be a NOTHING because in conveying meaning, it becomes a SOMETHING. It is what Patricia Oudek Laurence in her book on Virginia Woolf's silences refers to as narrating interiority, and she employs six "configurations of silence" to analyze those silences: "psychological, social, historical, philosophical, rhythmic, and structural" (42) The reading of narrative silence is difficult, Laurence says, "because one of the assumptions about reading here is that 'the reader brings to the surface a pattern or design that the work conceals; the reader fills the gaps'." (43)

In order for us to read silence, Laurence believes, the body in literature is crucial as "the loci of techniques for keeping silence as well as for expression. Bodily gestures and images are the means by which silence becomes externalized and visible to others: silence is embodied in women." (123)

As a literary vehicle, then, silence carries its own transformation, which is further complicated and most assuredly changed through the process of reception. We see the manifestations of silence clearly in Sor Juana's work, the subaltern voice held in check, yet ultimately finding its way into the public arena. We see it clearly, too, in her life, in all the active or passive attempts to subordinate her.

Frederick Luciani, in his intricate 2004 analysis of Sor Juana's life and work, *Literary Self-Fashioning in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, offers up the nun's silence as protest, maintaining it was indeed a stratagem, but one that evolved over the course of her life:

In the "Autodefensa espiritual" and the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, silence as antagonist is co-opted, in a way, by Sor Juana and made to serve her purposes.

She was capable of using actual silence (stoic, obstinate, discreet) as a form of eloquent protest, as she indicates in the letter written to her confessor. (130)

Rather than keeping silent, as many had advised when Núñez de Miranda slandered her, Luciani explains, she responded openly and frankly in the “Autodefensa,” the letter in which she fires him as her confessor, telling him that by keeping silent, she has not cooled his ire as she intended, but rather has irritated him. Therein, Luciani says, she had learned a lesson by placing her hand to the flame: “No wonder, then, that in the *Respuesta* of a decade later Sor Juana would negotiate a middle ground between the silence that seemed to inflame her persecutors and the unfettered speech that would rile them more” (130-131).

Grossi, in *Sigilosos V(u)elos*, also studies Sor Juana’s use of silence in major works like *Primero Sueño* and *El Divino Narciso*, and theorizes that, as it was in the *Respuesta*, silence was her means to an end. In Grossi’s analysis of this passage of the *Sueño* – “y la lengua que, torpe, enmudecida, / con no poder hablar los desmentía” – she elaborates the elasticity of the rhetoric of silence:

Al igual que en la *Respuesta*, el silencio puede ser una estrategia tanto de defensa y oposición, de alegato retórico y jurídico, como de ocultamiento alegórico de una multiplicidad de sentidos críticos. ... El silencio es signo tanto de los límites expresivos y miméticos del lenguaje como de su propia capacidad de cifrar, en su inagotable oscuridad, una profusión de sentidos alegóricos. El silencio es el emblema simbólico de la alegoría. (122)

The body of work on silence today is expansive, ranging from semiotics to psychoanalysis, and continues to evolve as it encompasses a broad spectrum of critical approaches. But after close reading of the past and the most current research on silence, what becomes most clear is the elusiveness of a definition. We attempt to say what silence is, but chances are it isn't that at all – which merely underscores the theory that the SPEECH/silence binary is also the SILENCE/speech binary, a circumstance that smashes all concept of a binary and sends silence free-floating into the philosophical ether.

How, then, do we reconcile Sor Juana's speech with Sor Juana's silences? How do we align the mercurial shifts in this woman who was so consumed by the *lexis* and at the same time so definitive about her *logos*? Again, if we look to Butler, to an understanding of how gender and identity are constructed, we find our own path to reading Sor Juana.

Performance: The “Doing”

We act up. We act out. We act crazy. We act mean. We act like we have no sense. We act like children. We act stupid. We act superior. We act like spoiled brats. We act macho. We act gay.

But what does it mean, to “act”?

In simple terms, we understand an act to be a performance, the repetition of ideas or beliefs about a social condition or system that communicates a discourse understood by the community at large. But just because we “act” a certain way, does it mean that we “are” a certain way? Does it mean that we could or will “become” a certain way if we “act” that way repeatedly? Or is it that we “act” that way because we already “are” that way?

In this maelstrom surrounding performance and gender / subject construction, a partnering of Butler's performance theory and Foucault's work on power and agency constitutes a useful

application to Sor Juana as it pertains to the relationship between Sor Juana (as subject/object) and the Church (as agency).

A problem during my research was how the words “performance” and “performativity” were used. Many theorists seemed to use the terms interchangeably. Some marked grammatical and linguistic differences, while others noted the difference in meaning. Ultimately, I found that any attempt to sort out “performance” and “performativity” must return to Butler herself, who makes the distinction in a post *Gender Trouble* interview. Performance presumes a subject, she says, whereas performativity “contests the very notion of the subject”:

It is important to distinguish performance from performativity . . . What I'm trying to do is think about performativity as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names. Then I take a further step, through the Derridean rewriting of Austin, and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. So if you want the ontology of this, I guess performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. Performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed. (Butler, “Gender as Performance” 111-112).

Butler also describes it as “the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains.” Which, in highly oversimplified language, means that if the “normal” or accepted discourse disseminated by agents of power tells us that women are weak and men are strong, women will perform the weakness behaviors they know and understand as

acceptable and men will perform acceptable strength behaviors and, eventually, that is what women and men “are” because everyone says and accepts it is just so.

Left at that, the theory assumes a lack of awareness of one’s performative behavior (citationality rather than intentionality) which would yield automatic behaviors. However, performativity (the repetitive acts that constitute performance) yields not a lack of new, creative or original behaviors, but rather opens the window for resistance and transformative actions. In the spaces between *acting* and *being* exist critical gaps, temporal divisions of *becoming* that allow spaces for liminality, ambivalence, resistance, and sometimes, transcendence. This is where Sor Juana’s changes happen, including the mysterious changes late in her life – in the silent spaces between utterance, reiteration (performance) and the formation of the subject. Her life is filled with such gaps, never empty, always loaded with the material and authority for transformation – mimicry, performance, transgression and ambivalence. Born woman, *criolla*, and illegitimate, Sor Juana is always-already Other and thus predisposed to performance and transgression. Her grandfather’s library provided a transgressive space, one in which she learned of the world’s Other transgressive, (per)formative spaces. At Court as well as in the convent, she performed as the discourse of her time-space demanded, but always already as an Other, finding the liminal spaces in which transgression, transformation and transcendence could occur. Her performances occur through poetry, letters, learning, all couched within the accepted discourses of Church and Crown. Her tricks of the weak provided rich performative fodder for resistance.

Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel does not believe that for Sor Juana the feminine perspective takes on academic and pedagogical discourse, “sino que se incorpora en este lenguaje educativo para acceder y difundir un conocimiento dentro de las redes oficiales e

institucionales que propagaban y sostenían el saber secular y religioso en la época. De este modo, los textos urden una subjetividad racional que se inserta en un corpus de saber existente y que añade, con su experiencia y su parcialidad, nuevas inflexiones a temas centrales para la epistemología de la época” (95). Thus, by taking on the academic language of the colonizer, Sor Juana was able to establish pedagogical credibility as well as bypassing acquisition of the gendered viewpoint dictated by the epistemological body of knowledge of the time. Martínez-San Miguel’s theory is in keeping with Monique Wittig’s philosophy that gender-neutral subjectivity can be established through language.

But Butler warns that if we follow Wittig, “The practical task that women face in trying to establish subjectivity through speech depends on their collective ability to cast off the reifications of sex imposed on them which deform them as partial or relative beings. Since this discarding follows upon the exercise of a full invocation of “I,” women *speak*¹⁶ their way out of their gender. . . . In speaking, the “I” assumes the totality of language . . . (Gender Trouble 117) For Butler, the problem with that notion is that establishing the *locus* for subjectivity within speech alone locks in (embodies) the possibilities for the construction of gender and of the subject in general. If defined only by speech, we lose the endless possibilities for subject construction to be found in the liminal spaces silence provides for transgression and transcendence. According to Amy Hollywood, Butler

. . . argues that performativity is a kind of ‘citational practice’ by which sexed and gendered subjects are continuously constituted. The gaps and fissures in that citational process – the ways in which repetition both repeats the same and differs and defers from it – mark the multiple sites

on/in which the contestation of regulatory norms occurs . . . Butler grounds resistance not in bodies or materialities external to systems of regulatory discourses and norms but in the processes of resignification through which body subjects are themselves constituted” (94).

I find support here for the theory that Sor Juana’s silences are the performances through which her resistance to Church patriarchy is made possible. There exist obvious ties with postcolonial theorists like Spivak and Bhabha and with how mimicry, ambivalence and liminality work on the subject in the wake of domination, all of which are applicable to Sor Juana.

In an analysis by Carrie Galloway Blackstock of performance and performativity in Anne Bradstreet’s life and work, we see the universality of socio-historical and literary context, and it is certainly not a theoretical stretch to draw comparisons between the subaltern subject-formation of Bradstreet in England and Sor Juana in New Spain. Both were seventeenth century women, both were wives (albeit to very different “husbands”), and both were writers shackled by the discourses of their church. Bradstreet may have been Puritan and Juana may have been Catholic, but the prevailing discourse on women remains identical. Bradstreet “predates the twentieth-century decentering of the self by some 300 years” (222), Blackstock tells us. As did Sor Juana.

Even as Puritanism mandated self-subordination to God, Anne Bradstreet invested herself in numerous roles, among them not only dutiful daughter

and Puritan, but also devoted wife, mother, grandmother, poet, admirer of nature, and advocate of women's worth. Numerous attempts to privilege one of these positions over others suggest efforts to disclose the "real" Anne Bradstreet, but such readings tend toward over simplification of her complexity. . . . Yet in response to the strictures of her era, Bradstreet cultivates her identity through multiple modalities of self, in a manner both deliberate and intricate. . . . Bradstreet reacts against patriarchy's same restraints on herself by engaging in disparate roles one at a time. Through this deployment of identity, she maintains multiple aspects of herself in a way that mitigates their forbidden integration." (222)

We see in Sor Juana exactly that intricate cultivation of identity through "multiple modalities" – the child prodigy, the Crown's lady-in-waiting, the cloistered nun, the rebellious daughter, the bride of Christ, the scientist, the writer – all reiterative performances that stacked like bricks and mortar to form the subject. And we most clearly see the way she was able, through her writing, to be true to all those modalities in order to avoid censure for their "forbidden integration."

Some of Bradstreet's poetry allows her to give voice to the performativity of self-assertion as a means of resistance to the patriarchal control of her husband and her church, according to Blackstock, and those poems "constitute performances of her character's distinct but related identities." She cites as support Butler's performance theory, that which "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (222, citing *Gender Trouble* 136)." But the challenge for Bradstreet, Blackstock says, "existed in navigating

between Bradstreet's position as a woman writing the poems, her advocacy in them of values considered feminine, and her society's rejection of female autonomy. She had to undergo a considerable degree of self-splitting, then, in the very process of affirming herself and her gender, which is all the more problematic since such assertion was necessary to build the sense of self that her culture so strongly disavowed" (22).

And so for Sor Juana as well as for Bradstreet, there existed in self-splitting a way to circumvent the modes of behavior acceptable for women in the seventeenth century, in the subterfuge of self-awareness couched as self-denial, in false humility, in what Luciani terms "literary self-fashioning."

"Butler posits gender as nonessential," Blackstock says, "comprised of effects rather than an underlying origin, and her depiction of gender as performative rather than essential is drag, or cross-dressing, 'a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation.' " (226). The argument can easily be extended that, for Sor Juana, the nun's habit is just such a drag performance – a posturing, a self-splitting, a silencing, an imitation, a deconstruction of gender recast as a neutral(ized) identity. All part of the "act." In "Reading Woman: Displacing the Foundations of Femininity," Wendy Burns-Ardolino analyzes the role of women's undergarments in gendered performativity, "the ways in which these garments encourage, train, and police women's performances of normative feminine motility, spatiality, and comportment" (43). She refers to Pierre Bourdieu's description of how "performatives become habituated through imitations of adult gestures, movements, and postures" (Burns-Ardolino 45, citing Bourdieu's *Outline of a theory of practice* 87), and says that women, even now, learn to have their bodies "read as feminine in order to survive in society" (48). For Sor Juana, the voluminous, all-concealing nun's habit would have served as an ironic metaphor for

femininity in her gender performance, blocking even a minimal reading of her body as feminine and presenting her to the world as an androgynous bride of Christ so that she can be accepted into the restricted milieu of Church society.

[I]deal femininity may be evidenced anywhere in popular culture, and women are constantly reminded of what ideal femininity means. ... the foundation garment frames precariously the feminine subject/object contradiction and as such performs itself as a signifier of the oppression of woman who has been habituated into the performatives of gesture, movement, and motility while confined within the moving frame of varying shapes and sizes. (Burns-Ardolino 49)

Instead of the foundation garments of today, Sor Juana's veil and habit acted as the unwavering signifiers of asceticism and oppression, as the Church-imposed means to make of Sor Juana (and any other nun) an object of the patriarchal gaze and to silence the feminine.¹⁷ By performing the role of bride of Christ, however, Sor Juana could perform the rituals her roles demanded, and through her writing and silences alike, she could transcend objectification of both body and spirit to continue the formation of her identity and maintain her voice.

But, how does that happen? Amy Hollywood reminds us that Butler "locates the force of the performative in the chiasmatic relationship between speech and the body" (99). That intersection of utterance and matter acts as a gap, of sorts, certainly not as an empty one but rather as a loaded, chaotic, and quite possibly violent, gap. Both Butler and Derrida find significance in the "iterability, or repeatability, of the sign":

[I]t is this reiterative structure, the fact that the sign is the same and yet also differs and defers (both from possible referents and from other signs), that marks its force (and its power of signification). Butler argues that for Derrida the force of the performative lies in its ‘decontextualization’; because the mark must be repeated in order to signify, it is always both tied to and divorced from its original context of utterance. This separation, according to Butler, provides the performative’s force” (Hollywood 104).

In Sor Juana’s performances, then, we find her *locus* of transformation, in the repeated places of decontextualization that create a gap (silence) between utterance and the speech act that is anchored to the body. This is the loaded borderland between doing and being, the created and recreated spaces in which signification can be manufactured.

In order to fully grasp the ontology of subject construction and maintenance as an approach to reading Sor Juana, it is important to understand that performance, as a repetition of acts, is pivotal not just in gender construction, but also in the development of other social interactions, discourses and constructs. For that reason, the silences in Sor Juana’s life or body of work can be explosively loaded performances that (re)present or make possible her survival and that provide the spaces wherein her resistance foment, ferments and erupts.

Resistance: Talking Back, Moving Forward

As a means of combating the effects of colonialism and of illustrating the struggle of the subaltern to grow into subjectivity from the liminal state – the silence, or gap, that

characterizes the borderland (slash) of any dominant / submissive binary opposition – we look to the inclusion of the varied and many voices of the subaltern.

The exile therefore exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. Being skilled at survival becomes the main imperative . . . (Said 114)

For Sor Juana – a subaltern by dint of being woman, *criolla*, poor, and a nun – the process of resistance to those who dominated her world was taxed by the intersection of the circumstances of her birth and social position, and it rendered critical for survival all and any transformative spaces she was able to occupy. Because the process of rupturing, deconstructing and restructuring the binary is a constant reification, it is a performance of doings that includes, perhaps most importantly, resistances to the dominant in the binary that has created the liminality. As we have seen, performative silence would have been a vital stratagem to help clear a path wherein Sor Juana could resist suppressions that otherwise might have stripped her of subjectivity and intellectual voice.

An intellectual may work out an accommodation with a new or emergingly dominant power in several ways, including the rather shady art of political trimming, a technique of not taking a clear position but surviving handsomely nonetheless. (Said 116)

Resistance for this writing nun meant surviving as a subject – even as that same resistance threatened her with destruction – and performances like mimicry, sly civility and the widely utilized false humility would have constituted the political trimming to which Said refers. For all subordinated groups and individuals, the means devised to circumvent patriarchal oppression by necessity were clever and varied.

Sor Juana clearly followed the paradigm of the colonial subject, embodying the hybrid nature that follows in the wake of the colonial imposition of culture, language and religion. In coexisting with colonizers like the Crown, the Court, the Church and its clerics, she was able for many years to mimic acceptable roles even as she contested them, even benefiting from the ambivalence of colonizing dominants like the viceroys and vicereines who so carefully protected her. If in her later years, as she lost that patronage and protection, she did indeed slip into silence, we have absolutely no proof – in fact, I find no indication at all – that such a silence would have signaled her complete capitulation to authority. It follows that she would have utilized the performative behaviors that accompanied her always, and those performances included silent resistance.

When women keep their silence they occupy a space defined by contrary male impulses of fear and desire. Enjoined to remain mute as a sign of chastity and obedience to allay male fears, the early modern woman may at the same time provoke those fears by becoming either unfathomable or openly resistant. (Luckyj 70)

Depending on the time and circumstance, Sor Juana was both unfathomable and openly resistant to patriarchal control. But while the “unfathomable” was a thread throughout her life, her open resistance had occurred earlier, in childhood as well as in the “Autodefensa” letter in which she fired her confessor, as Luciani points out. Later, in the *Respuesta* of 1691, we see how the open and aggressive strategy of the “Autodefensa” was tempered by polished rhetorics and feats of wordplay that mimic acceptable approaches to authority and are meant to alternately dazzle, confound, cajole and, in the main, convince. Homi Bhabha tells us that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (126).

Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers. (126)

Throughout her lifetime, Sor Juana certainly produced her own slippage, her own excess, and her own difference. Yet no matter the time or shifting circumstances of her life, her performative behaviors surfaced faithfully, guiding her through the cycle of silent interstices that would protect her, supporting her through the resistances that emerged from those liminal spaces, and grounding her when she teetered on either dangerous or disastrous end of the dominance / submission binary. For the gifted Sor Juana, slippage and excess were performances – the repetitive doings that propelled her.

The chapter that follows locates and identifies some of the silences found in Sor Juana's *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, and provides the basis for additional analysis of those silences as performances that create and support resistance in her other epistolary production, poetry and drama.

CHAPTER III

HEARING SILENCE: THE *RESPUESTA*

. . . *aquellas cosas que no se pueden decir, es menester decir siquiera que no se pueden decir, para que se entienda que el callar no es no haber qué decir, sino no caber en las voces lo mucho que hay que decir.*

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in the *Respuesta*

From the outset of Sor Juana's delayed response to the bishop of Puebla for his betrayal in publishing a work of hers not intended for publication and for the accompanying letter of censure from "Sor Filotea de la Cruz," Juana's anger and fear simmer, revealing themselves in the clever rhetorics with which subordinates (women, nuns, the poor, and the indigenous) had to oh-so-subtly carve the details of their messages in the hope of avoiding retribution. This chapter is a close reading of the *Respuesta*¹⁸ that concentrates on analysis of the obvious, hidden, intended and perhaps unintended silences, gaps and liminal spaces that create performative resistances in this work.

It is significant that Sor Juana waited roughly three months to respond to the bishop, although the sheer length of her response, so carefully crafted, would account for at least some of that time. Her very first sentence contains a reference to that delay, and she continues that thread by mentioning the obstacles that served as agents of silence to prevent or delay her response:

No mi voluntad, mi poca salud y mi justo temor han suspendido tantos días mi respuesta. ¿Qué mucho si, al primer paso, encontraba para tropezar

mi torpe pluma dos imposibles? El primero (y para mí el más riguroso) es saber responder a vuestra doctísima, discretísima, santísima y amorosísima carta. (38)

By citing that three-month delay – an obvious silence during which she would have had time to think, to plan and perhaps to undergo some sort of change – Sor Juana makes clear to the agents of power from the outset how weak she is, how scant her health, and how fearful she is. With affected modesty, she quickly establishes herself as non-threatening; she acknowledges (albeit ironically) “Filotea’s” learned superiority, referring to her, however obviously insincerely and sarcastically, as “doctísima, discretísima, santísima y amorosísima.”

All of that superiority sent her dull pen stumbling, she says, and therein we see another reference to the silencing of her pen. Josefina Ludmer refers to this as one of two types of “tricks of the weak,” separating knowing from saying:

Juana states right off that she *doesn't know how to say*.¹⁹ Not knowing leads to silence, is directly related to silence. Here, however, it is a matter of a relative and positional not knowing: not knowing how to speak to one in a superior position, a not knowing that clearly implies recognition of the other’s superiority. (87-88)

Summoning Aquinas

Juana immediately follows false modesty with a triple-play strategy in the significant utilization of the name of St. Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century Dominican priest who successfully married theology with philosophy and science, one of her greatest intellectual passions:

Y si veo que preguntando el Angel de las Escuelas, Santo Tomás, de su silencio con Alberto Magno, su maestro, respondió que callaba porque nada sabía decir digno de Alberto, con cuánta mayor razón callaría, no como el Santo, de humildad, sino que en la realida es no saber algo digno de vos. (38)

First, summoning his name would appear to have offered her some protection in that it aligned her with one of the Catholic Church's most respected and revered saints. "The voices of the highest authorities support her," including Thomas Aquinas (Ludmer 88). If her views on science and theology followed St. Thomas' own, how could Church leaders possibly sanction her for those views without discrediting a popular saint whose writings contributed to the foundations of contemporary religious teaching. Remember, however, that in her original letter, (the *Carta atenagórica*) she had defended the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican, who had been attacked by Antonio de Vieira, a Jesuit. The rivalry between religious orders (to also include the Franciscans and Augustinians) in New Spain already was fierce and well-established, taking root and spreading rapaciously during the Conquest.²⁰ Ecclesiastical success during colonization of the New World was defined by the number of indigenous souls converted to Catholicism, and by extension it translated as the ability to control the indigenous populations' rich natural resources for the Spanish Crown. Historians like Walter F. McCaleb and Donald Chipman have described the symbiosis between Church and Crown in practical terms. "The purpose of the viceroy was plain. He looked to the permanent settlement of the country [New Spain] as the best safeguard for the interests of Spain. Such a settlement could be made in no way so securely and with so little effort as through the agency of a mission. ... The arm of the

Church was everywhere the willing instrument of the state – and a mighty arm it was” (McCaleb, 31). As the northward push toward Tejas continued, the missionary settlements of the religious orders and their religious and political relations with the indigenous peoples all served to forward the economic agenda of the Spanish Crown. We have only to note Chipman’s description of Zacatecas’ silver mining community as a “classic boom town with sixty-one mine owners in residence” (46) and its settlers as “the silver aristocracy” (47) to understand why, as the dominant religious orders jockeyed for position across New Spain, establishing missions would help anchor Church and Crown alike atop lodes of silver, cattle, and other riches.

In calling forth the name of Thomas Aquinas, then, Sor Juana – whether intentionally or unintentionally – was poking a wasp’s nest with a very short political stick. In a seventeenth-century battle between theologians and philosophers, the only possible winners would be men, and the collateral damage this time would prove to be Sor Juana. No matter how logical or erudite her arguments, she was standing in the path of their patriarchal stingers and the netting of clever words would prove to be scant protection indeed.

The second prong in naming Aquinas is a still obvious reading of this passage as veiled sarcasm. It serves as her way of telling the bishop that she is well aware of his betrayal, without letting on to anyone else that she knew what he had done and that she was not just hurt by him but also furious with him. By paralleling the bishop’s role in her life with that of Aquinas’ teacher, Albertus Magnus – who rigorously defended, in public, the orthodoxy of his former pupil’s views when Aquinas came under attack by those who wished to condemn his writings – she sends a silent, highly loaded and personal message that highlights the poorness of the bishop’s role as her teacher and friend in comparison with Albertus Magnus’ genuine mentorship and defense of Thomas Aquinas. As Grossi tells us, the nun uses complex rhetorical devices as a

means of establishing her own agency: “[I]ntenta autorizar, legitimizar simbólicamente, tanto el establecimiento de su espacio literario, como su lucha por mantenerlo y fortalecerlo” (30-31).

To open up a third reading of her reference to Thomas Aquinas, however, it is important to know that while writing his master work, the *Summa Theologica*²¹, his health declined and his ecstasies increased. The online *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that “On 6 December, 1273, he laid aside his pen and would write no more. That day he experienced an unusually long ecstasy during Mass; what was revealed to him we can only surmise from his reply to Father Reginald,²² who urged him to continue his writings: ‘I can do no more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value’ ... Thomas began his immediate preparation for death” (Kennedy). He died four months later.

It is no stretch to suggest that the well-read Sor Juana, known to admire Aquinas’ ability to reconcile theology with scientific theory, would not have hesitated to compare herself to him intentionally as she wrote her *Respuesta*, drawing a parallel so that the Church might see her, at least symbolically, as setting aside her own pen. As an opening salvo, it certainly would have served as a prelude to an intentional decision (threat) to withdraw from letters, given the lack of a good teacher to act as her mentor and to defend her orthodoxy. And as performance, it would have been a familiar rhetoric positioned as one of the weapons of resistance she had repeated by “doing” throughout her life and career.

The question that remains is, was Juana capable of truly silencing herself in this manner, as Aquinas did? Or perhaps, was she capable of threatening or suggesting such a silence as a means of manipulating her circumstances and preempting further sanction. I suggest both are possibilities, and not mutually exclusive ones. We know that Juana the student was quick to learn and facile in repeating that knowledge. In her writing, we see repeated displays of the Latin she

had learned and of the scientific observations that guided her, as well as evidence of the authors she had read. As part of her “doing,” she would have been more than capable of repeating the patterns she had absorbed into her subject construction. To restate Butler: “This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation . . . this action is a public action” (*Gender Trouble* 140). In threatening to silence herself, then, Juana would have been performing the sort of silencing-as-punishment she had learned from those who attempted to control her.

La Madre del Verbo

Juana’s references to silence and silencing continue. Still at the beginning of her letter she refers to the “favor” done her by publishing her work: “no sólo no se puede estrechar a lo limitado de las voces, pero excede a la capacidad del agradecimiento, tanto por grande como por no esperado.” She immediately quotes Quintilian on “benefits conferred,” saying the result is that “enmudecen al beneficiado.” (38) In that passage alone, we see multiple references to silence: “limitado de las voces,” “excede a la capacidad del agradecimiento,” and “enmudecen al beneficiado.”

In one short passage, she makes it clear that she knows what is in play and that it is clear to her that publishing her work against her wishes was an attempt to limit future possibilities and spaces for her words. Especially significant is the phrase “enmudecen al beneficiado” for its double entendre: the literal interpretation is that the recipient is rendered speechless by virtue of her own surprise; the thinly veiled meaning is that it was an intentional attempt by Church authorities to silence her words.

She immediately draws on a Scriptural motif by calling up the story of Elizabeth, six months pregnant with the child who would become St. John the Baptist, when she was visited by the Virgin Mary, then pregnant with Jesus. Sor Juana refers to Mary as “la Madre del Verbo” (38), a brilliant verbal play that calls on references to Jesus as the Word of God and who, as man or Message, serves as an instrument to carry out the will of his almighty father. It is words that Juana is talking about here, and she elevates their importance by her simple and theologically unimpeachable reference to Jesus as Word. When Elizabeth saw the Mother of the Word, “se le entorpeció el entendimiento y se le suspendió el discurso...” (38).

The same happened to her when she saw that her letter to the bishop had been published, Juana says, and in admitting that her own wits were dulled and she lost her ability to speak, she cleverly makes the accusation that Church authorities, in printing her work without her permission, were intentionally attempting to create problems that ultimately would prevent her from writing and speaking her mind.

Naming Silence

Sor Juana makes yet another reference to the amount of time that elapsed between the publication of the *Carta atenagórica* and her response to it. “Casi me he determinado a dejarlo al silencio” (40). In admitting that she changed her mind about responding, she reveals the liminal space in which the change took place and allows us to glimpse the borderland wherein her subject construction came up against external discourse.

In the long segment that follows, however, we find a deliberately constructed treatise on silence. Indeed, why would Sor Juana write at such length about silence if silence – whether imposed by others or implemented by her own decision – had not been at the center of her

dilemma? What we find is a philosophical exploration of silence and its meanings that is critical in attempting to understand the silences of Sor Juana's last years. It is perhaps most significant for the fact of its very inclusion in the *Respuesta*:

[C]omo éste [el silencio] es cosa negativa, aunque explica mucho con el énfasis de no explicar, es necesario ponerle algún breve rótulo para que se entienda lo que se pretende que el silencio diga; y si no, dirá nada el silencio, porque ése es su propio oficio: decir nada. Fue arrebatado el Sagrado Vaso de Elección al tercer Cielo, y habiendo visto los arcanos secretos de Dios dice: *Audivit arcana Dei, quae non licet homini loqui.*²³ No dice lo que vio, pero lo que no puede decir; de manera que aquellas cosas que no se pueden decir, es menester decir siquiera que no se pueden decir, para que se entienda que el callar no es no haber qué decir, sino no haber en las voces lo mucho que hay que decir. Dice San Juan que si hubiera de escribir todas las maravillas que obró nuestro Redentor, no cupieran en todo el mundo los libros; y dice Vieyra, sobre este lugar, que en sola esta cláusula dijo más el Evangelista que en todo cuanto escribió; y dice muy bien el Fénix Lusitano (pero ¿cuándo no dice bien, aun cuando no dice bien?), porque aquí dice San Juan todo lo que dejó de decir y expresó lo que dejó de expresar. Así, yo, Señora mía, solo responderé que no sé que responder; solo agradeceré diciendo que no soy capaz de agradeceros; y diré, por breve rótulo de lo que dejó al silencio, que sólo con la confianza de favorecida y con los valimientos

de honrada, me puedo atrever a hablar con vuestra grandeza. (40, 42)

Sor Juana is telling her reader(s) quite frankly what it would have meant for her had she decided to abandon her reaction to having been betrayed and decided to remain silent. For Juana, whose life had been spent in singleminded pursuit of the learning contained in books and the words that constituted her knowledge, silence in this context is an undeniably negative event and she is absolutely clear in stating her opinion without adornment: “como éste es cosa negativa.” In order to supply meaning to silence, she says, there must be an interpellation, else there is nothingness: “es necesario ponerle algún breve rótulo para que se entienda lo que se pretende que el silencio diga.” Of those things which cannot be named, she says, it is even more critical to name them “para que se entienda que el callar no es no haber qué decir, sino no caber en las voces lo mucho que hay que decir.” How much clearer can she be in stating that silence, unnamed as silence, is nothingness, but silence named is an infinite vessel of meaning.

In the remainder of the passage, Sor Juana names her silence: “y diré, por breve rótulo de lo que dejo al silencio, que sólo con la confianza de favorecida ... me puedo atrever a hablar con vuestra grandeza.” She only dares to speak to those superior to her by virtue of gratitude for their attentions to her. In naming her own silence this way, she avoids its nothingness and makes of it a something, “hailing” it into a subject position that cannot disappear or be ignored. Given the transparency of her meaning, how could her final silence have been a void of capitulation to the agency against which she fought throughout her life? Rather, it must be read as the loaded repetition of behaviors that make up a performative resistance to patriarchal interpellation and ecclesiastical agency.

Moises, el “balbuciente”

There follows a number of less developed references to silence, including one to Moses, a stutterer who felt himself unworthy to speak to the Pharaoh, in which we see how she again aligns herself with a figure unimpeachable by Church authorities despite his inability to speak without hesitation to a figure of agency. Moses, finding himself so favored by God, “que no solo habla con el mismo Dios, sino que se atreve a pedirle imposibles: *Ostende mihi faciem tuam*”²⁴ (42). In using Moses’ words to God to demand the impossible – “shew me thy face” – Sor Juana cagily and necessarily masks her own demand that her betrayer come forward and reveal himself, rather than hiding behind the name “Sor Filotea.” For an undefended although courageous woman like Sor Juana, it must have been galling to watch the cowardly obscurity from whence the bishop had attacked her.

Ruidos

The portion of the *Respuesta* that follows begins a sort of legal defense peppered with the language of the Law and is threaded with a central theme: fear. We see a recurrence of the issue of silence in relation to that fear, and references surface here to the Santo Oficio (the Holy Office or Inquisition). Sor Juana chooses her words carefully.

Sor Filotea’s admonition that Sor Juana would do better to apply herself to the study of Sacred Scriptures summons a defensive reaction, touching as it does on Juana’s admittedly second-best commitment to her vocation as a nun and to her celebrated forays into scientific arguments that could call into question her acceptance of the divinity of her calling: “Aunque viene en traje de consejo, tendrá para mí sustancia de precepto” (44). Defensive reaction to a warning, one that carries with it the weight of law for the recipient, would indicate a threat of

repercussion perceived or understood, and it is probable that Sor Juana would have known that the Santo Oficio would brook no vacillation in her absolute orthodoxy: “resonándome siempre en los oídos, con no pequeño horror, aquella amenaza y prohibición (sic) del Señor a los pecadores como yo” (44). If she did not write often enough about sacred matters, she says, it was not because she did not care nor was it a lack of appreciation for the topic, but because she was in no way worthy or prepared to do it justice.

Y así confieso que muchas veces este temor me ha quitado la pluma de la mano y ha hecho retroceder los asuntos hacia el mismo entendimiento de quien querían brotar; el cual inconveniente no topaba en los asuntos profanos, pues una herejía contra el arte no la castiga el Santo Oficio, sino los discretos con risa y los críticos con censura. (44)

With the phrase “me ha quitado la pluma de la mano” we see a return of the performative silencing with which she was familiar, of the self-censorship that would have protected her from censure by the priests or confessors who reviewed her work. She says her fear stilled her pen. However, she locates the source of that fear in her own humility, in her lack of worthiness to tackle Scriptural topics. We find a cautious admission of her fear of the Holy Office, as she cushions her words in the protection of false modesty. She was not hesitant to write about more profane topics, she says, because the Holy Office did not punish “herejía contra el arte.” That was the job of “discretos con risa y los críticos con censura” (44), and worldly wit and criticism did not result in an inability to attend Mass and take Communion. It tells us she was aware of

the sanctions the Holy Office could meet out, to include the spiritual punishment of excommunication for myriad transgressions, and the ultimate corporal punishment of death for heresy. She knew where the dangers lay, so she restates her ignorance with false modesty:

¿Qué entendimiento tengo yo, qué estudio, qué materiales, ni qué noticias para eso, sino cuatro bachillerías superficiales?²⁵ Dejen eso para quien lo entienda, que yo no quiero ruido con el Santo Oficio, que soy ignorante y tiemblo de decir alguna proposición malsonante ... (46)

I find it significant that she chooses the word “ruido” to indicate “trouble” with the Inquisition, rather than a host of other possible words. With its non-idiomatic meaning as “noise,” “ruido” returns us to the theme of silence she has woven throughout her letter to this point and indicates she was aware that she could be silenced by the power of the Inquisition if the Holy Office were to cast its eyes her way. Publication of a controversial letter like the *Carta atenagórica*, especially with an accompanying letter of admonishment like Sor Filotea’s, easily could have made enough “noise” to draw the wrath of the Inquisition to her.

She makes yet another reference to her fear in an explanation about why she is even attempting to write the *Respuesta*, although she masques it as a fear of her own ineptitude and the errors she makes by taking up her pen:

Y protesto que sólo lo hago por obedeceros; con tanto recelo, que me debéis más en tomar pluma con este temor, que me debierades si os remitiera más perfectas obras. (82)

Even given her fear, however, there is a headstrong recklessness in the *Respuesta*, obvious in no small number of contradictions that serve as refutations to her own false humility, as if she could not bear her own forced submission to authority. Just such an example of her resistance follows her declaration of fear of the Holy Office:

Lo que sí es verdad que no lo negaré (lo uno porque es notorio a todos, y lo otro porque aunque sea contra mí, me ha hecho Dios la merced de darme grandísimo amor a la verdad) es que desde que me rayó la primera luz de la razón, fue tan vehemente y poderosa la inclinación a las letras, que ni ajenas reprensiones – que he tenido muchas –, ni propias reflejas – que he hecho no pocas –, han bastado a que me deje de seguir este natural impulso que Dios puso en mí (46)

If she did indeed fear the Holy Office, and we have no reason to believe she did not, why would she admit – despite “admonishments from others” (an obvious reference to the reprimands of her former confessor, Núñez de Miranda, to devote herself to more appropriate devotional writings) and the concerns of her own introspection – that her passion and vehemence continued to dictate her approach to letters and learning? Butler tells us that “[t]o persist in one’s being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one’s own. Those terms institute a linguistic life for the ‘one’ who speaks prior to any act of agency . . .” (Butler, *Psychic Life of Power* 197). Given that, Sor Juana the nun undeniably was locked in by social terms not her own, yet she defined herself by her passion for learning and to deny that would be to deny her very being. Her means of persisting in her being, then, would have been to play the game

demanded of her even as she defied it. In realizing the tentative legal ground on which the admission of her vehemence for writing could place her, she throws caution to the wind and pushes back at authority, declining to omit the admission from the letter (for it is there for us to read) and instead adding the mitigating argument that it was God who gave her the need for learning so it must be defensible.

Su Majestad sabe por qué y para qué, y sabe que le he pedido que apague la luz de mi entendimiento dejando solo lo que baste para guardar su Ley, pues lo demás sobra, según algunos, en una mujer; y aun hay quien diga dañá. Sabe también Su Majestad que no consiguiendo esto, he intentado sepultar con mi nombre mi entendimiento, y sacrificársele sólo a quien me le dio. (46)

We find a reference to silencing in the phrase “que apague la luz de mi entendimiento.” And again, it is by Juana’s own terms that the silencing occur, this time by God’s hand. She is powerless to control this gift, she maintains, yet she wishes to abide by his Law. In an attempt at compliance, she tells us, she has tried to bury her intellect along with her name (identity) as sacrifices to God. With this she again reveals a familiar pattern of actions and doings, the repetition of her relentless internal quest for knowledge clashing against her often half-hearted attempts to abide by the controls brought to bear from without. In the ambiguous spaces created by those repetitions brewed the changes that brought about resistance to authority. This was a behavior she knew well. Ludmer maintains that Sor Juana:

erects her chain of negations: not to say, to say that one doesn't know, not to publish, not to dedicate herself to sacred matters. The double gesture combines acceptance of her subordinate position ... and her trick: not so say but to know, or saying that one doesn't know but knowing, or saying the opposite of what one knows. This trick of the weak ... combines, as in all tactics of resistance, submission to and acceptance of the place assigned to one by the other, with antagonism and confrontation, retreat from collaboration. (91).

Withholding

For Sor Juana, the double gesture to which Ludmer refers acts as a strategy for pushing back, and withholding – a loaded silence for the intended lack of information, or gap, it creates or carries within it – becomes a critical tool. She makes numerous references in the *Respuesta* to concealing, to secrets, to keeping still. As the “legal defense” portion of her letter draws to a close, the much studied autobiographical portion emerges and we see how from childhood she learned how to employ the tool of withholding.

She had what may well be one of her earliest experiences with withholding when, at roughly three years of age, she followed her sister to the *Amiga* to learn to read: “la maestra lo ocultó,” she says, and admits, “y yo lo callé, creyendo que me azotarían por haberlo hecho sin orden” (48) She did indeed learn to read, and knew it to be the success of her teacher's withholding the information from her mother. Just as important, she knew even then that through withholding she could exercise her own agency and thereby avoid punishment. However, she filled those silences with meaning, with learning, with resistance to authority (even when that

authority was matriarchal rather than patriarchal), and established a performative pattern of “doing” that would serve her throughout her life. As Juana herself tells us in the *Respuesta*, “es menester mucho uso corporal para adquirir hábito” (56).

Deconstructing St. Paul

Perhaps one of the most popular segments of the *Respuesta* is Sor Juana’s explanation of St. Paul’s belief that women should remain silent in church. Feminist theorists continue to cite it as yet more justification for appropriating Sor Juana as an early feminist, but her own words should disavow us of that reading. Her interpretation of St. Paul’s words neatly deconstructs gender binary and removes it from the equation:

A esto dice el Apóstol: *Dico enim per gratiam quae data est mihi, omnibus que sunt inter vos: Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere, sed sapere ad sobrietatem: et unicuique sicut Deus divisit mensuram fidei.*²⁶ Y en verdad no lo dijo el Apóstol a las mujeres, sino a los hombres; y que no es sólo para ellas el *taceant* [Let them keep silence] sino para todos los que no fueron muy aptos. (82)

Gender, for Sor Juana, was neither a measure of nor a predisposition to quality or intelligence. If she railed against patriarchy, it was against the agency of patriarchy, for we have only to remember how she circumvented the authority of her mother in learning to read to understand that her issue was with the agency itself, not with the gender wielding that agency. In that, she is more colonial object than gendered subject, performing her multiple positions as

subaltern (illegitimate, woman, nun, *criolla*) and in doing so resisting discursive limitations. Butler reminds us that the sexed body is constructed culturally, formed by the external discourses that regulate it. “The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (*Gender Trouble* 148). Sor Juana, then, in deconstructing the binary of St. Paul’s highly gendered and misogynistic discourse, establishes a politics of resistance wherein her subjectivity is articulated.

It is important to note that, here again, she is not opposed to silence. In fact, silence would be a benefit in those “que no fueron muy aptos.” She also may have been issuing yet another cleverly veiled *piquete* with which to insult the bishop.

Nun, Interrupted

Most of the silences that many might perceive as negative or empty spaces actually provided places of refuge for Sor Juana – for example, “el sosegado silencio de mis libros” (50) – yet she cites the lack of a formal teacher (a silence) and the lack of support such a voice would provide (a gap): “careciendo de la voz viva y explicación del maestro” (52). She later repeats the complaint, adding the lack of fellow students with whom to share learning (another gap): “Lo que sí pudiera ser descargo mío es el sumo trabajo no solo en carecer de maestro, sino de condiscípulos con quienes conferir y ejercitar lo estudiado, teniendo sólo por maestro un libro mudo” (58). What she had instead, she says, were the noisy interruptions of the other sisters in the convent as she tried to read or who would come to visit her when she was writing: “en vez de explicación y ejercicio, muchos estorbos ... haciéndome muy mala obra con muy buena voluntad” (58). Those interruptions acted as silencings for Sor Juana, as obstacles that impeded the intellectual process or blocked her ability to put her thoughts into writings.²⁷

A Double Bind

While those interruptions resulting from the daily rhythms of community life in a convent were benign and certainly were not intentional acts aimed at hindering her studies, she says, there existed a much more dangerous attempt to silence her:

. . . 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 mí han sido, no son aquéllos (sic) que con declarado odio y malevolencia me han perseguido, sino los que amándome y deseando mi bien . . . 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. ¿Qué me habrá costado resistir esto? ¡Rara especie de martirio donde yo era el mártir y me era el verdugo!* (60, 62)

In a direct shot across the bow of the bishop's ship, she labels him an asp, a danger and a threat to her in the guise of a loving, caring friend who humiliated and tormented her. How was she to react to such betrayal, she asks?

Arenal and Powell believe that the declaration – “¡Rara especie de martirio donde yo era el mártir y me era el verdugo!” – foreshadows her final silence as intentional:

The *Answer* not only responds to the bishop, it also alerts Sor Juana's circle of friends to the dangers she faces. In our reading, further, it declares for posterity her own coming silence – implying in advance what that silence will mean. In answering the bishop's letter, Sor Juana uses the word *castigo* (chastisement, punishment) insistently. Thus she responds to his *stated* threat of damnation and to an *unstated* condemnation, already circulating, that might well have included the spectre of the Inquisition. (30)

They maintain there is a shift in tone and approach between the 1681 letter, in which she fires her confessor and “implicitly declares her intention to continue both cultivating her interest in learning and accepting requests for religious and secular entertainments,” and the 1691 *Respuesta*, in which she “tacitly announces a change of course: in the face of both friendly admonition and unfriendly threat, she will again take matters into her own hands . . . She does not here name what that course is to be. In a striking parallel to some of the studious women who collaborated with St. Jerome in the fourth and fifth centuries and to whom she refers repeatedly in the *Answer*, Sor Juana will end her life as an ascetic” (30-31).

Virginia Bouvier, also citing “rara especie de martirio,” expands its all-important Inquisitional context: “el acusado tenía el poder de condenarse o salvarse con una confesión,” and she cites Benassar's study on the Spanish Inquisition:

‘El interrogatorio acorralaba al acusado, le oponía interiormente a sí mismo, le echaba en cara sus propias declaraciones anteriores, le arrancaba nuevas confesiones’ (Benassar 50, in Bouvier 70).

Given those circumstances, Bouvier says, “el proceso requería que el reo fuera su propio verdugo,” and only a confession and the full conversion of the penitent – in this case, Sor Juana – could save the life of the accused: “no debe sorprendernos que la mayoría de los reos no sufrieron la muerte por haberse mostrado ‘cooperativos’ con las autoridades inquisitoriales” (70). A deeper contextual reading of Sor Juana’s intentions in the “rara especie de martirio” statement helps us hold together that which does not make sense, those isolated words and phrases that have become so difficult to reconcile within the body of her work as we know it today. Because when she announces a bit later in the *Respuesta* that she will submit, without question, to any decision about her future in letters, we can clearly see it as her means to a potentially life-saving solution: She will perform for the powers that be. She will employ the Inquisitional standard for saving oneself from the fire – submission and subjugation – and if that means “silence” in the eyes of the Church and the Holy Office, Sor Juana has the bitter consolation of knowing it will never mean “silence” for her. She may still her pen, but that self-silencing in itself is what will speak to the world.

My reading of this self-silencing goes far beyond the belief so widely and popularly theorized up until the latter part of the twentieth century that it was capitulation born of fear.²⁸ It expands Arenal / Powell’s theory that she “tacitly²⁹ announces a change of course” and “takes matters into her own hands,” and expands as well Luciani’s belief that she was negotiating a “middle ground” and that she knew how to “co-opt silence as antagonist” (130). The announcement, as well as the self-silencing itself, was performative, a calculated and deliberate agentic displacement of the power of the dominant’s gaze. The performance fomented in the loaded three-month interstice before she released the *Respuesta* to the world, and acting from within the discursive construction of the hegemonized subject, Sor Juana mimicked the tools of

authority she had learned from agents of power (Irigaray's mimesis, Spivak's "strategic essentialism"). The "colonized" subject – Sor Juana, the subordinate – shifted within the liminal space to mimic the agency of the colonizer – the Church: "The ambivalence of colonial [and ecclesiastical] authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 132). And it is that very mimicry that

problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the "national" [the Church] is no longer naturalizable. What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*,³⁰ a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry repeats rather than represents . . . (Bhabha, 128).

The "writing" that emerged for Sor Juana was the resistance that made possible the perpetuation of her construction.

"Obro necesariamente"

If we agree that Sor Juana did indeed suggest her coming silence in the *Respuesta*, no matter the motive, it is still important to understand that she was naming it – appropriating it, controlling it, performing it – as she had so many times before. But she also presents a depth of evidence (in her case, testimony) that refutes any statement she might make that shows she

would be capable of a true, negative, uninhabited silence that deprived her of learning. She tells us that Church authorities (we can assume Nuñez de Miranda, among others), wanting to redirect her unseemly inclination to study, convinced a very saintly mother superior to order Juana not to read because it was the work of the devil (“cosa de Inquisición”) (72).

Yo la obedecí (unos tres meses que duró el poder ella mandar) en cuanto a no tomar libro, que en cuanto a no estudiar absolutamente, como no cae debajo de mi potestad, no lo pude hacer, porque aunque no estudiaba en los libros, estudiaba en todas las cosas que Dios crió, sirviéndome ellas de letras, y de libro toda esta máquina universal. (72)

Note the key phrase, “como no cae debajo de mi potestad.” It is simply not in her power, she states, to completely abandon her studies. Nor is it in her nature: “Es de tal manera esta naturaleza o costumbre, que nada veo sin segunda consideración” (74). The entire segment on “filosofías de cocina” acts as a testament to her inability to encounter even the most mundane object or cotidian event without being completely engaged by it, without examining the metaphysical nature of an egg as it boils, for example. “Digo que esto es tan continuo en mí, que no necesito de libros (74) . . . ni aun el sueño se libró de este continuo movimiento de mi imaginativa” (76). She repeats the word “continuo,” which stresses the relentlessness of her quest for knowledge and which merely underscores the message that her studies will continue no matter the efforts to deprive her of a voice: “obro necesariamente” (76).

Given the intensity of her reiterated commitment to letters and knowledge, what reading should we give the brief passage that concludes the *narratio* portion of the *Respuesta*?

. . . vivo siempre tan desconfiada de mí,³¹ que ni en esto ni en otra cosa me fio de mi juicio; y así remito la decisión a ese soberano talento, sometiéndome luego a lo que sentenciare, sin contradicción ni repugnancia, pues esto no ha sido más de una simple narración de mi inclinación a las letras. (76)

Are we to believe she truly lacks self-confidence, that she does not trust her own judgment? Or do we read this – “vivo siempre tan desconfiada de mí, que ni en esto ni en otra cosa me fio de mi juicio” – as yet another trick of the weak? Too, note the sequence of words that follows: “remito,” “sometiéndome,” “sin contradicción ni repugnancia.” Was this part of her big withdrawal from life and learning, a glib but final flourish of the pen? When she places the decision (oddly, she does not elaborate here or identify what that decision is) into the hands of “ese soberano talento,” she was taking a stab at her betrayer, impugning with praise the bishop and friend who betrayed her. This is the same edgy, sarcastic, falsely modest Sor Juana who had fired off the *Carta de Monterrey* to her confessor in 1681, relieving him of his duties:

Vuelvo a repetir que mi intención es sólo suplicar a Vuestra Reverencia, que si no gusta de favorecerme, no se acuerde de mí, si no fuere para encomendarme al Señor, que bien creo de su mucha caridad lo hará con todas veras. (in Tapia Mendez 25)

If the language of the *Respuesta* is more cautious than that of the *Carta de Monterrey*, it is only marginally so. After all, by that point in her life and vocation, guarding sarcasm with

false modesty would have presented a flimsy shield indeed. Sor Juana quite literally was gambling with her life, and this was a gameplayer's bluff. If she offered to withdraw, to remit herself, to submit – all without argument – to one she clearly is mocking, how can we not read a lack of sincerity in that offer to silence herself. Luciani marks this as a strategy, as a means of manipulation in both the *Carta de Monterrey* and the *Respuesta*, saying it is Sor Juana's way of co-opting "silence as antagonist" (130) and making it serve her purposes. As we have seen throughout the *Respuesta*, she was more than capable of performing false humility, and more than adept at cat-and-mouse wordplay. Inconsistencies are rife in reading sincerity – especially a long-term commitment – into her offers to withdraw from letters or to announce a true "silence" of any sort. We have only to note the intensity of her need for knowledge. She herself tells us that *not* studying would be beyond her power: "obro necesariamente." She may say she will withdraw, but she clearly does not mean it. For Sor Juana, not writing or not saying did not represent the lack of a message or the absence of communication. She does in fact co-opt silence, as Luciani states, but in the insincerity of her response she finds voice for resistance, even for resistance of the Holy Office itself. For Sor Juana, the strategy of writing the *Respuesta* is an old and familiar doing, a performance that acts, at least in part, as her Judas kiss for the bishop, her traitorous friend, much as the *Carta de Monterrey* had acted as her resistance to Núñez de Miranda's heavy hand of control a decade earlier.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

*No soy yo la que pensáis,
sino es que allá me habéis dado
otro ser en vuestras plumas
y otro aliento en vuestros labios,
y diversa de mí misma
entre vuestras plumas ando.*

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, (*Obras Completas 1*, 159)

As the *Respuesta* draws to a close, we see two more references to Sor Juana's self-silencing. She was not about to go quietly, though, and if she were going to have to maintain a silence of any sort, everyone would have to hear it for a very long time to come. She repeats her offer to do exactly as Sor Filotea suggests: to keep still.

Si vos, Señora, gustáredes de que yo haga lo contrario de lo que tenía propuesto vuestro juicio y sentir, al menor movimiento de vuestro gusto cederá, como es razón, mi dictamen que, como os he dicho, era de callar ... (98)

But note that she phrases the offer in the subjunctive mood, leading with the qualifying "if" that indicates indecision and refers to an event that is not certain to happen. Only *if* "Sor Filotea" wishes her to keep still will she do so.

Then, as she draws her letter to a close and opens the final peroration, we find yet again the uncertainty of the subjunctive, the irrealis utilization of another “if” as she continues to carve out spaces for instability wherein resistance can be created:

Si algunas otras cosillas escribiere, siempre irán a buscar el sagrado
de vuestras plantas y el seguro de vuestra corrección, pues no tengo
otra alhaja con que pagaros. (102)

If she ever writes any more little scribbles, she tells the world, they will not really be of her voice because she will have submitted them to the censorship of “Sor Filotea.” The question now becomes, does submitting oneself to censorship to avoid sanctions that might include death constitute willing silence or capitulation? Or perhaps the question should be, does it constitute a silence at all? As we have seen, it would not if Sor Juana were performing the ritual of silence-that-is-not-silence and, in doing so, charging that silence with meaning. To call her final silence uncharacteristic would be to read her incorrectly. Luciani, too, believes any declaration by Sor Juana to keep silent is saber-rattling, merely a middle ground from a more mature Juana as she delivers the same message of resistance,³² and he sees the introspection in her work as “a constant turning inward . . . Sor Juana repeatedly represents the shutting down of commerce with the exterior world as an opening up of experience and intellect, an actualization of personal freedom” (158). Such a reading would be true to Sor Juana’s construction and would allow space for the borderlands in which she wrote and lived. If we acknowledge the negative end of the imposition of a binary (her physical silence) and embrace the positive end of it (her wordless, unfettered communication) – our reading would reflect the performative strategies that at least in part explain Sor Juana’s genius.

Luciani's approach falters, however, as he concludes *Literary Self-Fashioning* and admits his work on Sor Juana is a "liberation fantasy," one of many surrounding her life and work.

The hypothetical picture of the "final" Sor Juana that I have assembled above is composed of textual shards of her thought, cemented together with no small element of wishful thinking. It is, I suppose, another variant of the kind of rescue fantasy that seems to be a constant in Sor Juana studies. Criticism of Sor Juana's works has always shown a tendency toward apologetics and a discourse of liberation, as for example in efforts that feminist criticism has made to reclaim the nun's works from traditional patriarchal patterns of analysis and judgment ... Sor Juana has long been, I would say, a kind of cipher, a screen upon which her readers, in her own time as today, have projected their own hopes of liberation – political, sexual, intellectual, and so on. Her life story lends itself to liberation scripts of different kinds [...] I rescue her from the darkness and silence of her final years by imagining that she achieved, at last, an individual, interior freedom. (159)

I find it odd that Luciani concludes a work of such insight and innovation with the same sort of misguided and gendered discourse in which generations of *sorjuanistas* have enclosed Sor Juana. "Liberation" assumes an *a priori* domination binary, the sort Sor Juana battled her entire life. For there to be liberation, there has to have been imprisonment, a captor and a captive, and in Luciani's case, a savior. To continue to see Sor Juana in that way serves only to perpetuate the sadly romanticized White Knight discourse that has attempted to render women needy and incapable of survival without male

intervention. It is to keep her locked in the misogynistic, ecclesiastical – and gendered – discourse that strove to keep her veiled, submissive, and deprived of a voice. That would be a mistake, warns Kirk, who believes that Butler’s theory of gender performativity “helps illuminate the irrelevance of the biological, sexed origin of the writing subject” (133).

For Luciani to succumb to a liberation fantasy, then, is also to see her final days as Paz and others have seen them – filled with loneliness and fear, rather than with the friendly silence of her own thoughts, enriched by the scientific observation that constituted her schoolroom and replaced her books. We have but to listen to her own words to wonder how her final days could possibly have been “silent”:

“Digo que esto es tan continuo en mí, que no necesito de libros.”

“Ni aun el sueño se libró de este continuo movimiento de mi imaginativa.”

“Obro necesariamente.”

Must we assume that, when her books and scientific instruments were no longer within her reach, she meekly flipped the switch on her brain and let prayer fill the void? Must we assume she no longer took interest in watching the wonders of the world and instead turned her eyes solely to heavenly introspection? Must we assume that, if words were not flowing from her pen, that words had left her life? No, to offer rescue of any sort is at best patriarchal and serves only to deprive Sor Juana of the subject she had so carefully constructed.

To *give* Sor Juana a voice, to *let* Sor Juana speak, to *free* Sor Juana, is to assume a control that assumes domination and acts as an attempt to silence her yet again. In the portion of the poem cited at the beginning of this chapter, she is telling us that she knows exactly who she is, no matter how hard others have tried to change her or mold her to their wishes. She is not who we think she is, she says. She has performed the roles assigned to her or that she has chosen, and she wanders, endlessly and

unfettered, through them all. We have the sense that she sees our reception of her subjectivity entirely as our problem and certainly not her own:

*No soy yo la que pensáis,
sino es que allá me habéis dado
otro ser en vuestras plumas
y otro aliento en vuestros labios,
y diversa de mí misma
entre vuestras plumas ando. (Obras Completas I, 159)*

As I said at the beginning of this study, Sor Juana's final withdrawal was her loudest statement of all, a loaded silence that contained the weight of performance and resistance and that helped carry her subject construction far beyond the limits of her corporal confines. When she scrawled, in her own blood, "Yo, la peor del mundo," Sor Juana undeniably gave us the performance of a lifetime.

NOTES

1 The emphasis is Butler's.

2 The “stain” of illegitimacy – perpetrated by a feudal obsession with unbroken bloodlines of inheritance and by Church demands for “limpieza de sangre” – has carried through the ages. For the young Juana, her illegitimacy in all likelihood would have prevented her from marrying well or from being accepted into a convent. In 1951, for an international celebration marking the 300th anniversary of Sor Juana's birth, eminent *sorjuanista* Ermilo Abreu Gómez, writing for the Pan American Union, offered what today resounds as embarrassed apologia: “No cabe imaginar – porque no es cristiano hacer tal cosa – que Sor Juana, al conocer su condición de hija natural, con poco respeto, hablara en público, por medio de sus versos, de la culpa o de la deshonra de sus padres. Pero estas son meras suposiciones. Es mejor suspender todo juicio hasta que no se tengan documentos que evidencien la verdad del caso” (Abreu Gómez 321).

3 The year of Juana's birth is alternately given as 1648 and 1651. Arenal and Powell cite a baptismal record that gives her birth date as Dec. 2, 1648. However, when she entered the convent in 1668, she gave her birth date as Nov. 12, 1651: “...youth supported her reputation as a rarity” (4). For clarity, I have chosen to use the baptismal record as her birth date.

4 As with her birth date, Juana's own documentation hides the fact that she was illegitimate and states that she has the “pureza de sangre” needed enter the convent: She “claimed that her parents were married” (Arenal/Powell 4). However, archival documentation upholds the fact of her illegitimacy.

5 All citations from Sor Juana's *Respuesta* are from Arenal and Powell's *The Answer / La Respuesta*, 1994.

6 Paz is referring to an essay he wrote in Paris in 1950 at the invitation of *Sur* magazine -- “Homage to Sor Juana de la Cruz,” published in volume 206 and dated December 1951, pages 29-40 – to celebrate the 300th anniversary of her birth. He acknowledges in his prologue to *Las trampas de la fe* that the article provided the “origen lejano de este libro.”

7 Stephanie Merrim's citation is in notation 17, page 32 of her book, *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*: "Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Introduction to *Antología de poetas hispanoamericanos*, Vol 1 (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1927): p. lxxix."

8 Citations of Ludwig Pfandl's book, *Die Zehte Muse von Mexico, Juana Inés de la Cruz. Ihr Leben, ihre Dichtung. Ihre Psyche*, are taken from the copyrighted *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Project* online (see Works Cited), sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Dartmouth College: "Ofrecemos aquí el capítulo final conclusivo del libro póstumo de Ludwig Pfandl ... El gran hispanista alemán, murió el 27 de junio de 1942; su obra, que no pudo ser publicada durante el dominio nazi, apareció por fin en Munich, con autorización del Gobierno Militar Aliado."

9 The emphasis is Calleja's to denote his paraphrasis of the viceroy's words.

10 Nuñez de Miranda was also confessor to the viceroy and vicereine at that time.

11 The *Carta de Monterrey* is also referred to as the *Autodefensa spiritual de sor Juana*.

12 The emphasis is Paz's.

13 Vieira maintains that Jesus, in giving his life for humanity, dies and leaves; Sor Juana maintains that Christ did not leave humanity. For further analysis of the differences in their views, see Paz 511-516); also, Frederick Luciani 81.

14 All citations from the *Carta de Sor Filotea* are from the Dartmouth University Web site, the *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Project* online (see Works Cited) and are referenced hereafter as the SJICP.

15 *Chahuixtle* is a fungal disease that attacks the leaves of the maize crop. It is different from the edible *huitlacoche*, which attacks the kernels. Today, the word "chahuixtle" has come to signify an unforeseen disaster, or simply the unwelcome appearance of a person or event.

16 The emphasis is Butler's.

17 Foucault says that, in Christianity, "asceticism always refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of reality because most of the time the self is a part of that reality that must be renounced in order to gain access to another level of reality" (238).

18 All references to the text of the *Respuesta*, both in English and Spanish, and all page citations are from Arenal and Powell's dual-lingual *The Answer / La Respuesta*.

19 The emphasis is Ludmer's.

20 "The first Franciscan missionaries, sent by Carlos V at Cortés request, arrived in Mexico in 1523 and 1524. By 1559 there were 300 Franciscan friars at 80 missions throughout Nueva España. They were followed by the Dominicans (1525), the Augustinians (1533), and finally, the Jesuits (1571). Altogether some 12,000 churches were built during the three centuries of Spanish rule over Mexico." (Palfrey)

21 *New Advent*, the online Catholic encyclopedia, offers in its entirety the English version of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. The introduction states his purpose: "Because the doctor of Catholic truth ought not only to teach the proficient, but also to instruct beginners (according to the Apostle: As unto the little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat – 1 Corinthians 3:1-2), we purpose in this book to treat of whatever belongs to the Christian religion, in such a way as may tend to the instruction of beginners." For the entire text, see <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>>

22 Reginald was a Dominican theologian and Aquinas' confessor and constant companion.

23 Arenal and Powell translate this Latin phrase as, "That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter."

24 Arenal and Powell translate this Latin phrase as, "Shew me they face."

25 See note on "bachillerías" in Arenal / Powell, page 111.

26 Translation of the Latin: For I say, by the grace that is given me, to all that are among you, not to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise, but to be wise unto sobriety, and according as God hath divided to every one the measure of faith. (Arenal Powell 83)

27 Those interruptions did not stop her from learning, however, and she methodically lists the academic disciplines she has studied in what she maintains was her quest to understand Scriptures and the divine mysteries. It is interesting that in her technical and scientific explanation of her study of music, she speaks of

the musical intervals (gaps, silences) that act as interstices and make harmonics possible and shows us yet again that she understood well the role silence could play as a means of conveying meaning. (54).

28 Sayers Peden says that in her answer to Sor Filotea, “Sor Juana said that she would not again ‘take up my pen’ in defense against her attackers. She did not. There were a few ‘scribblings.’ She responded, for example, to praise resulting from the publication of the first two volumes of her works. She composed a few lines to the Conde de Galve and his lady. But the outpouring of *La Respuesta* had drained Sor Juana. Her spirit was subdued. She turned more and more to her religious duties” (12). I disagree with Sayers Peden’s sketch of a “drained,” defeated woman, “subdued” of spirit and content to turn out a few dutiful “scribblings.” The progression of contextual and intertextual readings of Sor Juana’s life and writing in the decades since Sayers Peden’s work, however, has kept pace with literary and social theories like those of Luciani and Grossi, to name a few.

29 I take issue with Arenal / Powell’s use of the word “tacitly.” If the intention is stated (or even perceived to be stated), however cleverly in its casing, it cannot be silent; it carries not just the load of utterance but also the weight of meaning.

30 The emphasis is Bhabha’s.

31 Arenal / Powell translates “desconfiada de mí” as “wary of myself” (77), but the word “wary” seems too literal a translation. Rather than conveying wariness in the more loaded sense of suspicion, I believe the intention more appropriately would have been the more benign sense of insecurity, as Sayers Peden’s translation gives us: “with so little confidence” (34).

32 See this paper, page 45: “No wonder, then, that in the *Respuesta* of a decade later Sor Juana would negotiate a middle ground between the silence that seemed to inflame her persecutors and the unfettered speech that would rile them more” (Luciani 130-131).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS CITED

- Abreu Gómez, Ermilo. "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: En el Tercer Centenario de su Nacimiento: Vida y Obra." *Hispania* 34.4 (Nov. 1951): 321-326.
- Acheson, Kris. "Silence as Gesture: Rethinking the Nature of Communicative Silences," Second revision. Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University. (2008).
- Alatorre, Antonio. "La Carta de Sor Juana al P. Núñez (1682)." *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 35.2 (1987): 591-673.
- Arenal, Electa and Amanda Powell, ed and trans. *The Answer / La Respuesta: Including a Selection of Poems*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1994.
- Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs* 28.3, "Gender and Science: New Issues" (Spring 2003): 801-831.
- Benassar, Bartolomé. *Inquisición española: poder político y control social*. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1981.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28, "Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis" (Spring 1984): 125-133.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977.
- Bouvier, Virginia M. "Sor Juana y la Inquisición: Las paradojas del poder." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. Año 25.49 (1999): 63-78.
- Burns-Ardolino, Wendy A. "Reading Woman: Displacing the Foundations of Femininity." *Hypatia* 18.3 (Autumn 2003): 42-59.
- Butler, Judith. "Gender as Performance." *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*. Ed. Peter Osborne. London: Routledge, 1996. 111-112.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

- . *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997.
- Calleja, Padre Diego. S.J. *Vida de Sor Juana*. Ed. Ermilo Abreu Gomez. Mexico, D.F.: Antigua Librería Robledo.
- “Carta de Sor Filotea de la Cruz.” Page ed. Luis M. Villar. Feb. 22, 2004. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Project*, Dartmouth College: Hanover, New Hampshire. <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jo4IRYO8kh8J:www.ensayistas.org/antologia/XVII/sorjuana/sorjuana2.htm+carta+de+sor+filotea&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>
- Chipman, Donald. *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.
- Cixous, Helene. *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*. Ed. Deborah Jenson. Trans. Sarah Cornell et al. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Cohen, Thomas M. *The Fire of Tongues: Antônio Vieira and the Missionary Church in Brazil and Portugal*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982.
- Diehl, Joanne Feit. “‘Cartographies of Silence’: Rich’s ‘Common Language’ and the Woman Poet,” *Feminist Studies*, 6:3 (Autumn 1980): 530-546.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Trans. Robert Hurley et al. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1994.
- Galloway, Carrie Blackstock. “Anne Bradstreet and Performativity: Self-Cultivation, Self-Deployment.” *Early American Literature* 32.3 (1997): 222-248.
- Gere, Anne Ruggles. “Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing,” *College Composition and Communication*, 52.2 (Dec. 2001): 203-223.
- Glantz, Margo. “Octavio Paz and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s Posthumous Fame.” *Pacific Coast Philology* 28: 2 (Oct. 1993): 129-137.
- Grossi, Verónica. *Siglosos v(u)elos epistemológicos en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2007.
- Hatzfeld, Helmut. Rev. of “Die zehnte Muse von Mexico Juana Inés de la Cruz. Ihr Leben, Ihre Dichtung. Ihre Psyche” by Ludwig Pfandl. *Hispanic Review* 16.1 (January 1948): 79-81.
- Hollywood, Amy. “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization.” *History of Religions* 42: 2 (Nov. 2002): 93-115.

- Kennedy, Daniel. "St. Thomas Aquinas." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* vol.14. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. July 3, 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14663b.htm>>
- Kirk, Stephanie L. *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- Laurence, Patricia Ondek. *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Lavrin, Asunción. "Unlike Sor Juana? The Model Nun in the Religious Literature of Colonial Mexico." *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Ed Stephanie Merrim. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 61-85.
- Luciani, Frederick. *Literary Self-Fashioning in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press 2004.
- Luckyj, Christina. *'A moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Ludmer, Josefina. "Tricks of the Weak." In *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, ed. Stephanie Merrim. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 86-93.
- Luke, Carmen. "Women in the Academy: The Politics of Speech and Silence," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15.2 (1994): 211-230.
- Martínez-San Miguel, Yolanda. "Saberes Americanos: Constitución de una subjetividad femenina en la poesía lírica de Sor Juana." *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana*. Año XXIV, num. 49 (1999): 79-98.
- Mazzei, Lisa A. *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research Putting Poststructural Theory to Work*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2007.
- McCaleb, Walter F. *Spanish Missions of Texas*. San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1961.
- Méndez Plancarte, Alfonso and Alberto G. Salceda, eds. *Obras Completas*. 4 vols. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951-1957.
- Merrim, Stephanie, ed. *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- OCDS San Diego. Saint Joseph Community of the Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum Saecularis, San Diego, California. May 17, 2010. <<http://webcache.googleusercontent>

com/search?q=cache:KS9ecC48JGYJ:www.carmelite.org/+Carmelite+San+diego&cd=7
&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

Ockerbloom, Mary Mark. *A Celebration of Women Writers*. "Writers living between 1601 and 1700." Copyright 1994-2008. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/_generate/1601-1700.html>

Palfrey, Dale Hoyt. "Mexico's Colonial Era, Part 2." *Mexconnect*. Updated on Aug. 29, 2007. Copyright 2008. <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:JLxcmdC04sYJ:www.mexconnect.com/articles/1562-mexico-s-colonial-era-part-2+Dominicans+in+New+Spain&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>

Paz, Octavio. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S.A., 1982, 1997.

Pfandl, Ludwig. "Die Zehte Muse von Mexico, Juana Inés de la Cruz. Ihr Leben, Ihre Dichtung, Ihre Psyche." Trans. Juan A. Ortega y Medina. Universidad de México: *The Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Project*: 12.4 (December 1957): 15-17. <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:py23GS7M84oJ:www.dartmouth.edu/~sorjuana/Commentaries/Pfandl/Pfandl.html+Ludwig+Pfandl&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>

Rich, Adrienne. "Cartographies of Silence." *The Dream of a Common Language*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993.

Sayers Peden, Margaret, trans. and intro. *A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Salisbury, Conn.: Lime Rock Press, 1982.

Schons, Dorothy. "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz." *Modern Philology* 24.2 (Nov. 1926): 141-162.

Said, Edward W. "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals." *Grand Street* 47 (Autumn 1993) 112-124

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *The Answer / La Respuesta: Including a Selection of Poems*. Critical ed. and trans. by Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1994.

Stout, Janice P. *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

Tapia Méndez, Aureliano. *Autodefensa spiritual de sor Juana*. Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1981.

Urzaiz Rodriguez, Eduardo. "El espíritu varonil de Sor Juana." *El Hijo Pródigo* 8:25 (April 1945): 11-20.

Wray, Grady C. *The Devotional Exercises / Los ejercicios devotos of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Mexico's prodigious nun (1648/51-1695)*. New York: E Mellen Press, 2005.

WORKS CONSULTED

Ahlgren, Gillian T. W. "Negotiating Sanctity: Holy Women in Sixteenth-Century Spain." *Church History* 64.3 (Sep. 1995): 373-388.

Alaimo, Stacy, and Susan Hekman, eds. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Alatorre, Antonio, and Marta Lilia Tenorio. *Serafina y sor Juana (Con tres apéndices)*. México, DF: Colegio de México, 1998.

Alcoff, Linda and Laura Gray. "Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?" *Signs* 18.2 (Winter 1993): 260-290.

Alexandru, Maria-Sabina Draga. "Performance, Performativity, and Nomadism in Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 45.1 (2008): 23-39.

Arenal, Electa. "Comment on Paz's 'Juana Ramirez'". Rev. of "Juana Ramirez" by Octavio Paz. *Signs* 5.3 (Spring 1980): 552-555.

Bénassy-Berling, Marie-Cécile. Actualidad del sorjuanismo (1994-1999). *Colonial Latin American Review* 9 (2000): 277-92.

Bennett, Alexandra G. "Female Performativity in 'The Tragedy of Mariam'." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. 40.2 "Tudor and Stuart Drama" (Spring 2000): 293-309.

Bock, Philip K. "'I Think but Dare Not Speak': Silence in Elizabethan Culture," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 32.3 (Autumn 1976) 285-294.

Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Caranfa, Angelo. "Philosophical Silence and Spiritual Awe," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37.2 (Summer 2003) 99-113.

Carrette, Jeremy R. (ed.). *Religion and culture: Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

- Carruth, Hayden. "Fallacies of Silence," *The Hudson Review*, 26.3 (Autumn 1973).
- Castelló Yturbide, Teresa, and María Josefa Martínez del Río de Redo. *Delicias de Antaño: Historia y Recetas de los Conventos Mexicanos*. México D.F.: Landucci Editores, S.A., 2000.
- Cervantes, Enrique A., ed. *Testamento de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y otros documentos*. México, 1940.
- Counsell, Colin, and Laurie Wolf, eds. *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. London, New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Cowen, Robert. "Performativity, Post-Modernity and the University." *Comparative Education* 32.2, "Special and Post-Modernity" (June 1996): 245-258.
- Dauenhauser, Bernard P. "Discourse, Silence, and Tradition," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 32.3 (March 1979): 437-451.
- Delany, Samuel R., Sinda Gregory, Larry McCaffery. "The Semiology of Silence," *Science Fiction Studies*, 14.2 "Critical Approaches to Science Fiction: Retrospects & Prospects" (July 1987) 134-164.
- Digeser, Peter. "Performativity Trouble: Postmodern Feminism and Essential Subjects." *Political Research Quarterly* 47:3 (Sept. 1994): 655-673.
- Dreyfuss, Hubert L., and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982. (see page 208 for excerpts)
- Duranti, Alessandro. "Truth and Intentionality: An Ethnographic Critique." *Cultural Anthropology* 8: 2 (May 1993): 214-245.
- Duyfhuizen, Bernard. "Epistolary Narratives of Transmission and Transgression." *Comparative Literature* 37: 1 (Winter 1985): 1-26.
- Fish, Stanley E. "How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism." *MLN Centennial Issue* 91:5 (Oct. 1976): 983-1025.
- Fishman, Jenn, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor and Mark Otuteye. "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy." *College Composition and Communication* 57:2 (Dec. 2005): 224-252.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Vol.1*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

- George, Olakunle. *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Glantz, Margo. *Sor Juana: la comparación y la hipérbole*. México: CONACULTA, 2000.
- Glenn, Cheryl. *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.
- González Boixo, José Carlos. "La poesía de la 'inteligencia' en Sor Juana: Su proyección desde el ideario feminista." *Colonial Latin American Review 1466-1802*, 4.2 (1995): 125 -138.
- Gordon, Colin, ed. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977 - Michel Foucault*. Trans. Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Racial Memory and Literary History." *PMLA* 116:1, Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies (Jan. 2001): 48-63.
- Greer, Germaine. "Women with rhyme, reason and rhythm." *Observer* [London] 4 Nov. 2001, Sunday: p2 Features and reviews section. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4291431,00.html>>
- Jagger, Gill. *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Jakovljevic, Branislav. "Shattered Back Wall: Performative Utterance of 'A Doll's House'." *Theatre Journal* 54:3 (Oct. 2002): 431-448.
- Kalamaras, George. *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension: Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Kellett, Katherine R. "Performance, Performativity, and Identity in Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*." *SEL 1500-1900* 48:2 (Spring 2008): 419-442.
- Kirby, Vicki. *Judith Butler: Live Theory*. London: Continuum International, 2006.
- Kord, Susan. "Performing Genders: Three Plays on the Power of Women." *Monatshefte* 86:1 (Spring 1994): 95-115.
- Larish, Sharon. "Sor Juana's *Apologia*." *Pacific Coast Philology* 21, nos. 1-2 (November 1986): 48-53.
- Lashgari, Deirdre, ed. *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

- Leach, Neil. "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place." *Perspecta* 33, "Mining Autonomy" (2002): 126-133.
- Lloyd, Mona. *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power and Politics*. London: Sage, 2005.
- Loevlie, Elisabeth M. *Literary Silences: Saying the Unsayable: An exploration of literary silence in the works of Pascal, Rousseau and Beckett*. London: University of Oxford, 2001.
- Lootens, Tricia. *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Luckyj, Christina. "Volumnia's Silence," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31: 2 "Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama" (Spring 1991) 327-342.
- Luiselli, Alessandra. *El sueño manierista de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de México, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1993.
- Mairs, Nancy. "Conspiracies of Silence," *The Women's Review of Books*, 6: 10 (July 1989) 7-8.
- Marting, Diana. "Translator's Note: 'Juana Ramirez.'" *Signs* 5:1 "Women in Latin America" (Autumn 1979): 78-79.
- McDonald, Henry. "The Performative Basis of Modern Literary Theory." *Comparative Literature* 55: 1 (Winter 2003): 57-77.
- McDonald, Ronan. "Strategies of Silence: Colonial Strains in Short Stories of the Troubles," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35: "Irish Writing Since 1950" (2005).
- McHoul, A.W., and Wendy Grace. *A Foucault primer: discourse, power, and the subject*. New York: NYU Press, 1997
- McNay, Lois. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
- Milgram, Stanley, "The Dilemma of Obedience." *The Phi Delta Kappan* 55.9 (May 1974): 603-606.
- Myers, Kathleen A. "Broader Canon, Interdisciplinary Approaches: Recent Works in Colonial Latin American Literary Studies." *Latin American Research Review* 33: 2 (1998): 258-270.
- "The Addressee Determines the Discourse: The Role of the Confessor in the Spiritual Autobiography of Madre María de San Joseph (1656-1719)." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* LXIX (1992): 39-47.

- Oláníyan, Tejúmólá. "Contingencies of Performance: The Gap as Venue." *Theatre Survey* 50:1 (May 2009): 23-34.
- Orth, William. "The Problem of the Performative in Chaucer's Prioress Sequence." *The Chaucer Review* 42:2 (2007): 196-210.
- Parsons, Susan F. "Conceiving of God: Theological Arguments and Motives in Feminist Ethics." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4:4, "Is Theological Ethics Relevant for Philosophers?" (Dec. 2001): 365-382.
- Paz, Octavio. "Juana Ramirez." Trans. Diane Marting. *Signs* 5:1 "Women in Latin America" (Autumn 1979): 80-97.
- Perelmuter, Rosa. *Los limites de la femineidad en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Estratégias retóricas y recepción literaria*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004
- Poot Herrera, Sara. *Los guardaditos de Sor Juana*. México: Textos de Difusión Cultural, UNAM, 1999.
- Puccini, Dario. *Una mujer en soledad: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, una excepción en la cultura y la literatura barroca*. Trans. Esther Benítez. Salamanca: Anaya. 1996.
- Rappaport, Pamela Kirk, trans. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Selected Writings*. Paulist Press, 2005.
- Reinelt, Janelle. "The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality." *SubStance* 31:2/3, Issue 98/99, Special Issue: Theatricality (2002): 201-215.
- Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W.W. Norton Publishing, 1979.
- . "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *College English* 34:1, Women, Writing and Teaching (Oct. 1972): 18-30.
- Richter, Simon. "The Ins and Outs of Intimacy: Gender, Epistolary Culture, and the Public Sphere." *The German Quarterly* 69: 2 (Spring 1996): 111-124.
- Robinson, Jenny. "Feminism and the Spaces of Transformation." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 25, No. 3. (2000).
- Rowland, Stephen. "The Power of Silence: An Enquiry through Fictional Writing," *British Educational Research Journal*, 17:2 (1991).

Sabat de Rivers, Georgina. "Octavio Paz ante Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz." *MLN* 100:2 "Hispanic Issue" (March 1985): 417-423.

Schilling-Estes, Natalie. "Investigating 'Self-Conscious' Speech: The Performance Register in Ocracoke English." *Language in Society* 27:1 (March 1998): 53-83.

Searle, John R. "A Classification of Illocutionary Acts." *Language in Society* 5:1 (April 1976): 1-23.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *Carta Athenagórica de la madre Juana Ynes de la Cruz, religiosa profesora de velo y Choro en el muy Religioso Convento de San Geronimo de la Ciudad de Mexico cabeza de la Nueva España, que imprime y dedica a la misma Sor, Phylotea de la Cruz, su estudiosa aficionada en el Convento de la Santissima Trinidad de la Puebla de los Angeles*. Puebla de los Ángeles: Imprenta de Diego Fernández de León, 1690.

---. "Arguye de inconsecuencia el gusto y la censura de los hombres, que en las mujeres acusan lo que causan." *Momentos cumbres de las literaturas hispánicas*. Rodney T. Rodriguez. London: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004. 353-354.

Steiner, George. *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.

Trabulse, Elías. *Los años finales de sor Juana: Una interpretación (1688-1695)*. México: CONDUMEX, 1995.

---. "La última sor Juana." *Revista Iberoamericana* LXI:172-173 (1995): 639-649.

---. *La muerte de sor Juana*. México, DF: Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, 2000.

Walker, Michelle Boulous. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence*. London & New York: Routledge, 1998.

Warren, John T. *Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstitution of Power*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

Weber, Alison. *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990.

Worthen, W. B. "Drama, Performativity, and Performance." *PMLA* 113: 5 (Oct. 1998): 1093-1107.

Xirau, Ramón. *Palabra y Silencio*. Mexico: Siglo veintiuno editores S.A., 1968, 2nd ed. 1971.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marcia A. Caltabiano-Ponce has a BA in Spanish from the University of Maryland at Baltimore County, and in 2010 earned an MA in Spanish with a concentration in literature from the University of Texas-Pan American. She is a member of the national honors society Phi Kappa Phi. Her field of study includes a specialization in the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a seventeenth century nun writing in New Spain during the Spanish Inquisition.

She has been a journalist with Freedom Communications Inc. for more than thirty years, working as a news and features reporter and as an editor at all levels. She was managing editor of *The Monitor* in McAllen, Texas; served as launch editor of *La Frontera*, the only daily Spanish-language daily newspaper in South Texas at the time; and in 2008 was named editor in chief of *The Brownsville Herald* in Brownsville, Texas.

She lives with her family in McAllen, Texas. To contact her, email newsdame@aol.com; or write to her at 1408 Walnut Ave., McAllen, Texas 78501.