

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *The Answer*: "Words" Beyond Silence?

Alisa J. Tigchelaar

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

E-mail: atigchel@calvin.edu

Abstract: Since Seventeenth-century Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was rediscovered in the twentieth century, she has been valued as an early advocate for gender equality. Her peerless literary talent and notable production gave rise to public accolades in her lifetime, even as her singular theological acuity, daringly expressed in public formats, contributed to her eventual apparent silencing at the hands of Church authorities in "New Spain," who finally bid her cease secular study and writing. Using Sor Juana's last circulated written work, *The Answer*, as a point of departure, this study investigates how the rhetorical strategies the nun uses therein point to an affirmation of these central and interrelated things: her theology of the important Christian notion of vocation, and her ultimate right, even as a woman, to study secular material and write. Conclusions thus address what Sor Juana herself could have been saying through, and beyond, her ensuing public silence.

Keywords: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Answer*, (theology of) vocation, rhetoric.

Contextualization: "Rhetoric" in an interdisciplinarily accented humanities-based study

As the abstract alludes, and in keeping with the emphasis of the publishing journal, one important aspect of this study is the power of rhetorical strategy for itself, and what its use can tell us, in this case either in conjunction with or aside from words. Of course, many fields in the social science rely on tools such as rhetorical criticism and discourse analysis to explore the contextually significant aspects of language and its use that are relevant to their respective spheres. By comparison, contemporary applications in the humanities in general, and perhaps in literary studies in particular, may seem uncommon. [1].

Perhaps this perception (analogously) relates to why projects based in the humanities are relatively infrequent in journals such as this one. Nonetheless, a good number of *Sorjuanista* scholars in literary studies have relatively recently considered rhetorical strategy in the nun's work, as have academics in other areas. [2]. These interdisciplinary efforts invite further consideration of how central the matter is to approaching the seemingly unanswerable questions that *The Answer* (ironically) leaves readers with, also to be explored in this article. This study, however, includes other features with which some readers may have a more limited acquaintance, similar to my own prior one with certain aspects of rhetorical studies. These include, for example, the "theology of vocation," a concept from religious studies. Therefore, for as vital as it is both conceptually and functionally to this study, this paper does not consider rhetoric from a theoretical standpoint; instead, it provides more background on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and *The Answer* than is typically warranted in journals on literary studies, hispanism, or "nuns' studies," for example.

I hope this mention of my own process and the potential challenges that accompany interdisciplinary efforts, and the related content choices, will make this study more comprehensible to and enjoyable for an audience of readers from a variety of areas who may not be familiar with Sor Juana and her work (or my home discipline). I equally hope that potential deemphases or omissions taken in the interest of space or possible shortfalls in expertise that can sometimes attend

interdisciplinary efforts are not overly detracting. In terms of both, I look forward to perspectives from colleagues in other areas.

Introduction and main considerations

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (c. 1651-1695) was a seventeenth-century nun who lived in the viceroyalty of Mexico, or “New Spain.” As a child, she was a precocious genius, ostensibly learning to read at age three and penning her first poem at eight. As the nun admits in *The Answer*, she entered the convent in no small part to continue her exploration of many topics, arguing that God made her thus, and thus she follows who he created her to be. Until her early forties, the nun pursued her study and writing, producing, for example, poetry for favored powerful allies and plays for the convent.

By later in her life, however, Sor Juana’s political friends had moved on and religious strictures imposed by the Council of Trent made their way to the Americas, leaving the Hieronymite vulnerable when her theological challenge to a sermon of a Jesuit priest named Antonio de Vieira was published without her consent. Considering that Sor Juana had exceeded propriety as a woman with her critique, the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, used it as an opportunity to admonish her, recommending that she limit herself to devotional pursuits only (leaving aside theology, and secular studies and writing). *The Answer* is Sor Juana’s 1691 response to this church leader, following which she is largely silent, a decision many scholars link causally with what she says therein.

Even though Sor Juana studies has moved beyond the “forced-silence” meme advanced most famously by the Mexican thinker Octavio Paz toward a more nuanced perspective that considers said silence affirmatively, [3] it is nonetheless also lamentable since it is involved with one of many discouragements, which are all in turn related to general suspicion of Sor Juana’s intensely intellectual bent and preferred activities: Writing, study of a wide variety of topics and public display of theological talent were not, after all, the purview of women in the 1600s in the Spanish world. Sor Juana’s life experience was difficult, and any celebration of her potential rhetorical victory in *The Answer* must take into consideration coexisting suffering: For example, she mentions that not studying (it had been prohibited for periods of time before) made her ill, which is unsurprising given that this decision of authority figures amounted to psychological manipulation. Moreover, as we better understand today through more awareness of minority experience and related identity politics, Sor Juana could not have avoided struggling as a multiple minority: she was an illegitimate *criolla*, a female genius and scholarly religious woman.

Along with these life difficulties, those familiar with the nun mourn the cessation of the nun’s most natural (and therefore, arguably, best) output, a stunningly precocious flowering of “interdisciplinary” thought and expression that contrasted with a more rigid academic scene: Sor Juana had, for example, intersected theology and earth science in her most famous poem, and even contemplated the connections between cooking and philosophy. In conjunction with her interdisciplinary bent, the rhetorical features of *The Answer* themselves show readers what acuity will be stifled if she goes quiet. To name a relevant example, the nun’s singular dialogical genius oscillates between highlighting and obscuring her practical theology regarding the choice she is contemplating therein (so that others question what is right, too?), just as it lends diverse meanings to her expressions elsewhere in the letter.

Indeed, Sor Juana couches the dilemma of her identity as a scholar and writer within the theological and secular realms in terms of a particular theology of vocation within *The Answer*. Simply put,

she argues that God has called her to write and study, and that by virtue of doing these very things, she both upholds God's image in her, and is obedient to God as Creator. This personal vocational theology in turn speaks into what her silence means by illuminating how the nun herself seems to cast it in her letter. This study considers the following important interrelated aspects of this central issue as it builds toward its concluding reflections: Some previous scholarly responses to Sor Juana's silence, how the nun's rhetorical strategies might contribute to her arguable message regarding the silence that follows the letter, and how this message "moves beyond" the nun's public silence, both in terms of plausible fundamental reasons *why* she is silent *and*, relatedly, how she is *not* silent.

Understanding Sor Juana's vocational theology through dialectics

Just as they have moved away from an earlier "forced-silence" emphasis, researchers who have spent a lot of time with Sor Juana have recently responded more amenable to the idea that the Mexican's life beyond *Respuesta* could have included chosen, vocational aspects. Leading convent scholars Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell, for example, cast the ascetic lifestyle Sor Juana takes on at the end of her life as a choice that models other learned women even as they emphasize that her original convent decision came in part from reading the Christian fathers. [4]. And even Octavio Paz, earlier mentioned as the most famous proponent of the "forced-silence" perspective, equivocates, describing her end-of-life solitude favorably thus: *Imposed by the world, she transformed it into a accepted, and even chosen, destiny.* [5].

Of course there are reasons why some earlier scholars outright rejected the idea of silence as a vocational choice for Sor Juana beyond *The Answer*, or at most like Paz presented "chosen destiny" more parenthetically. The motivations initially included a (necessary) corrective of Sor Juana's first biographer, Jesuit Diego de Calleja, who inscribed her actions as turning towards a new vocation, one in which she somehow quickly and entirely rejected academic pursuits to seek some etherealized version of saintliness. What such **non-dialectical** notions as this incorrectly overwhelm, of course, is the importance of study, and even writing, as primary and God-granted vocational activities, expressed most stunningly in *The Answer* as: "You have compelled me." [6]. But, how can a **dialectical** [7] approach to both Sor Juana herself and her rhetorical strategy help us understand her better? The answer requires a bit of explication, which we do by way of example:

Scholars have long understood that open approaches to Sor Juana are probably the most fruitful because they take into consideration the dialectical nature of not just the nun-writer's Scholastic mind, but that of her entire person. One important well explored example of this recognition in scholarship are approaches to the body and the feminine in the nun's works. While Paz emphasizes the *rejection* of the corporeal or feminine in some of Juana's religious choices and writing, [8] he nevertheless notes positive maternal, real-worldly and/or feminine influences that other scholars *do* convincingly develop regarding the nun's writing in particular: For example, rhetorician Julie Bokser suggests that "the body figures in Sor Juana's defense" [9] in important ways, Arenal links the nun's "right to learning" with "the wisdom of the Virgin Mary," [10] and grounds Sor Juana's exploration of knowledge in her most famous poem, *El primero sueño* in the "female body," [11] and Rosa Perelmuter argues how Juana uses gastronomic references to reconcile the feminine self of the kitchen with the masculine self of writing. [12].

Indeed, experts seem to affirm that any non-dialectical view of Sor Juana's writing experience in general is a disabling one and resist it along with a binary ("this-or/versus-that") perspective on her experience with or treatment of the feminine or body. However, the resulting perspectives on

the nun as writer are not *always* positive: Paz for example suggests that Sor Juana learns about herself in her writing, but also hides, and that she probably wrote also for accolades, to provide herself with a mirror for a fragmented sense of her “self,” and to negate (rather than resolve) childhood wounds: *The cost was great*, he says, since *letters—the signs of things—substituted the things [themselves]*. [13]. In a related vein, Bokser notes that the muse’s pen reveals “both a countercultural *and hegemonic* figure,” [14] while Lisa Vollendorf considers that Sor Juana was, as a writer, *per se* under male domination. [15]. What is more, Sor Juana is *herself* obliquely self-critical in *The Answer*: her call to writing and study carefully measures not just the time she spends in the company of other nuns, but the type of love she finds herself capable of giving them: Since she studies a lot and has limited time, she doesn’t appear to go beyond the relatively anemic *obligation* of charity required by the societal order of Roman Catholicism.

All of this and more could explain, for example, the much-discussed potential interior motivations for Juana’s own ambivalence towards her signature intellectual gifts, given that the related negatives exist not in spite of, but in odd concert with, all of the more popular positives. What is certain is that, avoiding binary thinking by exploring the negative associations with aspects of academic pursuits together with the more overtly positive, brings a fuller, and probably more dynamically realistic, picture into view, one interestingly laden with almost inseparable “good” and “bad.” We continue by exploring how this dialectical approach might also shed light on Sor Juana’s vocational choice of silence towards the end of her life. [16].

In fact, *la Décima Musa* [17] herself suggests such a point of departure, for example by basing her theologies of anything, including that of vocation, in dialectics rather than dualisms: Vocation can therefore include both voice and silence, both negative and positive, both corporeal and mental, both spiritual and intellectual. More recent studies have begun to right the balance, but it strikes me that Paz’s approach to Sor Juana’s vocation in his brilliant and seminal work at least prevaricates on this point. [18]. He says regarding her decision to become a nun that *there is not the slightest allusion to the call of God or spiritual vocation* [19] in her decision (although elsewhere he affirms that *she continues to believe in the coexistence of her two destinies*, [20] which there he specifies as vows or religious obligations, and writing). It may be that, in staunchly defending the writerly aspect of Sor Juana’s vocation, Paz partially misapprehends Sor Juana as a (modern and?) dualistic figure whose 1691 *ownership of self* [21] gives way to seemingly overwhelming and paralyzing *fear* [22] (he uses this word as an isolated motivator with some regularity) in the last years of her life.

Relatedly, at least in some places, he seems to cast the Mexican nun in a sense of vocation that she herself does not really affirm in *Respuesta* (or anywhere else that I know of): it appears that for him vocation needs to be both the product of individual will, and a concrete, and potentially exclusive, activity. Regarding the first point, Paz says that the nun’s renunciation of letters *was not a voluntary act; it was more of a humiliation imposed by the ecclesiastical authorities*. [23]. Regarding the second, it appears at least here that Paz is hesitant to see any main calling outside of letters, which he describes as her *most personal vocation*. [24]. This essential thing, when wrested away by authorities against an opposing human will, leaves her, one might suppose, without vocation.

But Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is an Early Modern Christian. For such a Christian, vocation exists beyond one’s individual-ized (or dualistically conceived) essence or person, and therefore in a certain sense beyond one’s own volition or wanting. And it is not a single activity, such as writing, that may be humanly removed, either. Of course, *Trampas* was responding to excessively etherealized Christian viewpoints (see fn 18). And again, more recently it seems, academicians

have turned toward taking seriously how, among many other factors, Juana's religious commitment could figure in to her opting for public silence after *The Answer*. Even if they maintain different main emphases, they join explicitly Roman Catholic voices like that of Augustinian Father George Tavard in terms of further nuance than is often possible in more ground-breaking studies. [25]. It seems at least to me that this greater confluence of opinion has been in part facilitated by a more thorough understanding and acknowledgement of all possible contributions to Sor Juana's stance and choices. (Arenal and Powell put it this way: the nun silences herself in a "combination of anger, resentment, shock, hurt, contempt and fear," yes, but these emotions nevertheless contribute to a "decision... that had already been forming in her." [26].) Indeed, when Sor Juana's silence is approached non-dualistically for the dynamic paradox that it really is, vocation *joins* Paz's fear, and even interacts with it as a plausible true motivator for said silence, rather than one factor nudging the other off the table. [27].

Dialectical perspective and the theology of the (vocational) self

Father Richard Rhor of the ecumenical Center for Action and Contemplation does a series of meditations I get on my email. Postings that I read around the time I began research for an earlier version of this study posit the relationship of the human and the Divine in relevantly dialectical terms. Rhor explains that it rests on a non-dual [28] mind-and-heart-consciousness regarding (Christian) identity: The "I" is not "I," but rather "the-Divine-in-me." (Or, as Sor Juana says in *The Answer*, for example: "All things issue from God." [29]) Since God is Love, a true vocational objective is to love what God / Christ loves-in or through the believer, whatever that may be, whenever it be revealed.

This vocational perspective on selfhood, which Rhor associates with Saint John of the Cross and others, [30] is, to me, clearly one with which Sor Juana identified. Her apparent understanding of silence as a God-granted *fineza* (spiritual gift or demonstration of Love), vital life-cues rather than mere *inoffensive and subtle musings*, [31] comes to life in it, since, as Rhor puts it: "Only an in-depth spirituality can fully accept the paradox of our flawed humanity, indwelled by God's presence, where both light and dark are allowed and used by God." [32]. This joins Juana's arguments in *The Answer* regarding Christ as Divine knowledge, which, when approached through this vocational lens, suggest a differently *conceived* post-1691 future than that which authorities appear to impose beyond the letter (and Paz sometimes appears to negatively buy into) since there she equates (divine) Intellect with "being," or existence. In sum: Silence can be an outpouring of Divine Love (or "Self"), and, relatedly, Sor Juana is arguably decidedly *not* just giving up on her intellectual self-in-Christ by choosing it.

The *finezas* argument and the question of obedience

I think that Sor Juana's articulation of *The Answer* through this *finezas* argument, and the way that she vocationally positions her true "self" in relation to God therein, provide us with a plausible platform for understanding just how the nun locates this self *vis a vis* Church authority figures: most especially those who would recommend only *sacred* study, a rejection of secular letters, and radical denial of the God-infused self that loved such letters. With *The Answer*, Sor Juana is responding to "Sor Filotea's" injunction to stop studying for its own sake, and to learn only to the extent that it enriches her obedience. [33]. So, a central question becomes: Obedience to whom? With respect to writing, Sor Juana is clear: "[God has] compelled me ... My writing has never proceeded from from any dictate of my own, but a force beyond me ..." [34]. She is equally clear in defending her love of secular letters, but takes it further: they are a "native impulse that God

Himself bestowed in me.” [35]. Together, these statements about her most loved *and* God-bestowed activities imply that by engaging in them, in “being” through them, the nun is aligning her will with that of God, or being her true self, by acting in accord with how God “Loves-in-her.” That is: She is “obedient” to her God-given essence.

In contrast, when speaking of following the Bishop of Puebla’s “most holy admonition to apply my study to Holy Scripture,” she says: “it will have for me the weight of law.” [36]. However, Juana notes from the beginning of *The Answer* that God’s call or authority trumps that of other humans (or, one supposes, institutions), *and* one’s own (“native”) inclinations apart from God: “[N]ot only did you forbear to give another creature the power to judge me, nor have you placed that power in my [own] hands. Rather, you have kept [it] for yourself ...” [37]. Moreover, throughout *The Answer*, obedience to human superiors is often related to non-essential “custom,” such as when Sor Juana obeys a Mother Superior’s decree to stop studying for three months and then goes back to her books when this authority figure is replaced.

One *Answer* context in which the nun says she will submit to human chastisement and obedience in the current discussion of study and writing, suggests that she could view 1691 similarly. In the textual instance I’m talking about, her supposed submission is surrounded by two important things. The first is an articulation of what is *biblically legitimate* for women, in which Sor Juana provides “Doctor Arce’s” respected opinion [38] and her own (theologically accurate) interpretation of Saint Paul on the matter. Then, we have a *seemingly* tangential argument against “interpretation of the Sacred Word” by men who commit “numerous heresies” by inventing Laws that do not exist biblically: “innovations in the Law.” [39]. This sort of interesting confluence leads me to wonder if Sor Juana may be obliquely arguing that there could also be some form if heresy implied should her superiors go so far as to make, out of mere custom, a biblical law to be followed.

With Juana’s suggestion of heresy in mind, let’s go back to that vocational understanding of what Sor Juana claims led her to write and study in the first place: the *fineza* that is the articulation of God Himself and His Love in her. Can it be claimed that these human leaders deny an important (if not essential) part of who God Himself becomes in us (and therefore “is”), by shutting *her* down? Perhaps that would be going a bit too far; but if so, at least we can claim the assassination of the essential “knowledge-able” self that is her will under God, since just as the Pharisees did with Christ, the New-Spanish authorities ignore what is divine in Juana, including beautiful knowledge. For it is certain that, as Asunción Lavrin notes in her excellent article on the issue of obedience and authority and their caveats as they may pertain to Sor Juana, a sacrificial “holocausto” had been perpetrated. [40].

Finezas and the meaning of silence

The vocational self-understanding that speaks challengingly (and maybe even upendingly) to the human-authority question, can also help illuminate a potential conceptual *and* vital frame for the radio silence Sor Juana arguably forecasts in *The Answer*. As we’ve seen, the nun alludes to a central aspect of this understanding of calling when early on in her response she leaves the entire situation to God’s judgement and not to her own or to that of others. Subtly but tellingly dismissing “Filotea’s” potential corrective “punishments” at the outset of *The Answer*, she takes the whole silence issue up in terms of the more important measure: that of (God’s) “benefits.” [41].

As Grady Wray has noted, Sor Juana had previously related the theological argument that encases and perhaps underpins *The Answer*, that of *negative* benefactions in particular, to how one chooses to *act* in life situations in a previous public letter, *Carta atenagórica*, [42] this way: *pondering God’s benefits should not remain at the level of speculative discourse, but must issue in practical*

service, through which His negative benefits become positive ones, finding in us the appropriate disposition.” [43]. It seems that through her own arguments, Juana is removing the control of the situation from her immediate superior first by jettisoning the “punishment” concept she indirectly associates with him, and then by acknowledging *God’s* sovereignty and announcing that she will remain favorably disposed, rather than defeated, no matter what happens. More than that, beyond only meaning that she will receive the humanly negative as if it were humanly positive (which she clarifies she *does* mean), could she *also* be affirming a less static thing?: that she will remain open to understanding that God authors the dialogue between, or creates the vitally dynamic interweaving of benefits, both “light” and “dark” in Rhor’s terms, and not anyone else?

Of course, it should come as no surprise by now that Sor Juana’s statements are, in general, open to diverse and even opposing interpretations. And the last pages of *The Answer* do seem to reveal that Sor Juana is preparing to “triumph by suffering” [44] and readying herself to give up whatever authorities may ask of her. But again, she casts all of this in terms of the (negative) benefactions argument and vocabulary that sustains her entire narrative: it is “benefit” rather than “harm” [45] to tolerate enemies and detractors rather even than teach them, first because it requires a greater virtue than patience: love. [46]. So although it could seem that Sor Juana is (for example) merely setting up a consolation prize of a won argument for herself by applying to benefactions again nearer the end of the letter, she really is doing the same as she did at an earlier, less rhetorically urgent moment: removing the ultimate locus of control from her human superiors, to God.

She does this in two main ways. First, in beginning to wrap things up—“But, where am I bound, my Lady?” [47]—she returns to Vieira and establishes him, *and herself*, as human beings with opinions: “my judgement” [48] and his dissenting one. Directly thereafter, she goes back to Arce, who would have liked that a nun under his charge study not only “sacred letters,” [49] but “higher studies, guided by the principles of science,” [50] and to do so with male tutors. That is, another, earlier Catholic Spaniard (Arce) would have made a different choice than the one Juana fears Fernández de Santa Cruz will very likely take, and this anticipated sentence is tellingly and equitably cast as “your wisdom” to Juana’s (equally human) “decision.” [51] We remember from earlier in the letter, though, that ultimately, Juana’s “dictates” are *not* “[her] own,” [52] nor are they borrowed from other human beings; rather, they are of God. Juana returns to this interrelated point at the end of the letter also, acknowledging where her understanding of negative *finezas*, and the injunction to correspond them, comes from: “And so, for myself I know and own that this knowledge is a special favor from God,” [53] which echoes the language earlier found in *Carta atenagórica’s*: “which is superior knowledge.” [54].

Benefits understood through Seneca’s *De beneficiis* (*On benefits*) and implications

Sor Juana’s final parry in this regard, comes at the true end of the letter [55] when she quotes Seneca’s *De beneficiis* on the topic: “*it is shameful to be outdone in acts of kindness.*” [56]. Here, she is referring to her “nun”-interlocutor’s benefits, and as with “*Señora’s*” judgements, distinguishes them from the benefits from God by indicating that she herself cannot correspond the human ones responsibly; instead, “[t]hus you must be repaid by your own generosity.” [57]. This conclusion is ambiguous, but it is possible that Fernández is left the recipient of his own *relatively meager* generosity, by virtue of the ultimately unmet conditions set up by Seneca in *De beneficiis* for the reciprocation of them: “an honorable contest,” in which “the mind remains unconquered.” [58].

If indeed human judgement in general, and by extension human benefits regarding “correction,” [59] are relativized or even discarded via an unequal contest, then *The Answer’s* concluding “[t]hus

God behaved toward the world . . . : He gave His own Son that He might offer himself as a worthy amends” [60] stands alone as a standard for Juana herself, rather than Bishop Fernández being held up as a human interceding imitation. Sor Juana is left, through the Christian theology of her benefits argumentation, to rely on God’s “judgements,” and, in the final analysis, to model herself after Christ alone.

If this all holds, the final word of the letter, is the Christ: once the lamb silent before its shearers, always the Word whose silence speaks knowledgeable volumes, and through whose “choosing” guidance, Sor Juana wrote and studied secular letters in the first place: “a person . . . is granted significance by God, for He alone can do this.” [61]. Far from the closing volume it might paradoxically appear to be, then: Could *Carta* potentially stand as the nun’s defense of a *vital* (rather than merely rhetorical or theoretical) aperture regarding all that she defends as legitimate *vis a vis* female learning and writing?

Since Juana basically never again commits herself to “exterior” secular studies or writes (beyond some carols and 1693’s *Enigmas*) that we know of, though, one could wonder if the *distinction itself* is a vital one. Sor Juana herself indicates, it seems, that it is. As she recalls in *The Answer*, when she had previously spent three months without books at the command of a female superior, she felt that God’s world serves as her books, that she didn’t need them in order to advance, [62] and that, in fact, books impeded her intellect: “for my cogitations were [themselves] so strenuous and vehement that they consumed more vitality in a quarter of an hour than the reading of books could in four days.” [63] And of course, as several scholars have explored, [64] her most famous poem, *Primero sueño*, showcases how her writerly mind works *vis a vis* the created order, on a daily basis; in *The Answer*, Sor Juana famously references her experience thus:

What is more, My Lady, not even my sleep has been free of this ceaseless movement of my imagination. Rather, my mind operates in sleep still more freely and unobstructedly, ordering with greater clarity and ease the events it has preserved from the day, presenting arguments and composing verses. I could give you a very long catalogue of these, as I could of certain reasonings and subtle turns I have reached far better in my sleep than while awake. [65].

And it is arguably telling that Sor Juana’s reality in this regard joins that of male intellectuals like Lupericio Leonardo de Argensola, who could, she argues, “philosophize quite well while preparing supper.” [66]. And there is kitchen-“written” book Aristotle never penned All this begs a question: Does Sor Juana’s public / published silence, joined with references to her cyclical (*Sueño*) opportunities to create in her mind, forecast another opportunity for the nun? Relatedly, is it telling that she never wrote any devotional material, the genre that she was encouraged toward? Was she too beaten down? To ill? [67]. Or too busy with her more familiarly enjoyable, and powerful, interior voice?

Conclusion: Enigma

It is possible that the *Enigmas* poetry, which she *did* put out in 1693 after *The Answer*, indicate among other things that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wants what is going on in her interior writerly or intellectual landscape to remain the same vital issue that we see in the letter, and to which the verses themselves hearken. These poems, which remain underexplored, are quatrain-riddles written for Portuguese nuns, the answers to which arguably relate back to the larger topic that is also relevant to this study: (God-related) love, [68] and its corollary virtues and impediments. Here is one example that ties in Wisdom / Knowledge (the arguable answer) in an equally relevant way: What is that virtue

that with blind ambition
in capturing reason
frees all things? [69].

I would argue that what we see here is that Sor Juana continues to align herself to the Wise Christ's example (again, rather than the "dictates" of human reason). The point of the *Enigmas* is thus not, I would argue, definitive answers to the verses, but a revelation of the same constant and God-mandated interior exploration that she privileged before she set down her pen.

Of course, any such inventive assessments are by definition uncertain. I do think, however, that Sor Juana's understandings of identity and vocation, which we've explored here, when paired with her writerly clues in *The Answer* and *Enigmas*, may point in a potentially affirming direction. It also strikes me, though, that those of us who love her have all tended to privilege differently accented endings for her: for example, one in which she is either "Saved" (ostensibly from her writing self) as in some earlier Roman Catholic etherealized explanations of her last years, [70] or another in which she is "safe" somehow within her identity as a writer or scholar.

Luis Felipe Fabr , responding to Juana's *Enigmas* with some of his own verses in *Sor Juana y otros monstruos*, opines that *Sorjuanistas* can misunderstand the nun precisely through misguided attempts to love her. He says: "for some Sor Juana scholars, the immense love / they have for Sor Juana / prevents them from seeing Sor Juana clearly." [71]. As concerns the interrelated larger questions of God-love, vocational activity and (Christian) identity that Sor Juana vigorously pursues and, in the end, upholds, we have seen that misapprehended and inappropriately applied human "love," such as that of her superiors, can be seriously devastating things. I believe, then, that I should remain carefully skeptical about my own attempts to love Sor Juana In s de la Cruz, and the related assertions I put forward in this study.

References and Notes:

[1] For example, in a recent article on the subject, Dominique Maingueneau sustains that discourse analysis is "a new approach to literature." ([2010]. *Literature and Discourse Analysis. Acta Linguistica Hafniensia, International Journal of Linguistics*, 42[1], 147.)

[2] Specialists in fields as diverse as communications and theological studies have examined the power Sor Juana's choice of silence in particular. Rhetorician Julie A. Bokser notes that "I understand Sor Juana and her silence to be always immersed in rhetoric." (7). Similarly, theologian Rich Frontjes sees it as "an amplified mode of participation in the public discourse of her time." (para. 24). See their respective publications for more on their perspectives: Bokser, J. A. (2006). Sor Juana's Rhetoric of Silence. *Rhetoric Review*. 25, 5-21, and Frontjes, R. Silence as Speech: Reading Sor Juana's *Primero sue o* in Light of her Final Silence. Retrieved from <https://politicalanimalmagazine.com/sor-juana/>. Scholars in my own field will be referenced further on.

[3] After or around the same time as *The Answer* until her death four years later of an illness, Sor Juana is known to have written some carols and poetry (*The Enigmas*). *Sorjuanista* scholarship has also recently turned toward celebrating the small corpus of (post-)1691 output aside from *The Answer*.

[4] Arenal, E. & Powell, A. (1994). Introduction. In E. Arenal & A. Powell (Eds.), *The Answer / La respuesta: Including a Section of Poems* (pp. 1-37). New York: The Feminist Press.

[5] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana In s de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 159.

(Note: The references denote where readers can find the original Spanish; all English translations of Paz, indicated by italics, are my own.)

[6] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 47.

[7] This term is taken from dialectics, which assumes that truth is found precisely in the juxtaposition of apparently opposing notions or viewpoints. Both rhetorically and in terms of how she preferred to discover reality, truth and the self, Sor Juana sought the intersection of differing notions, outright rejecting almost none of them.

[8] For example, in *Las trampas de la fe*, Paz notes that Sor Juana rejects ecstatic experiences and flagellation, and is “neoplatonic” (or not embodied) in her writing self.

[9] Bokser, J. A. (2006). Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence. *Rhetoric Review*. 25, 13.

[10] Arenal, E. (2007). Sor Juana and Company: Intellectuals and Early Feminists. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, 38.

[11] Arenal, E. (2007). Sor Juana and Company: Intellectuals and Early Feminists. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, 43.

[12] In the original Spanish: “los dos ámbitos, el privado y femenino de la cocina con el público y varonil de la escritura y la ciencia.” Perelmuter, R. (2004). *Los límites de la femineidad en sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Estrategias retóricas y recepción literaria*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 57.

[13] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 117.

[14] Emphasis mine. Bokser, J. A. (2006). Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence. *Rhetoric Review*. 25, 11.

[15] She does this by affirming the opposite: “*Retirement* from the world of writing is a symbolic gesture of *freedom* from male control.” (Emphasis mine. [2007]. “Across the Atlantic: Sor Juana, *La respuesta*, and the Hispanic Women’s Canon.” In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau [Eds.]. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. New York: MLA, 101.

[16] It should of course now be clear how “forced-silence” and “choice” can co-exist for Sor Juana, and that our emphasis is choice.

[17] Sor Juana was well known by contemporaries in both Spain and New Mexico for her literary achievements. “The Tenth Muse” was one of a few international nicknames that illustrate the nature of her fame.

[18] Paz’s impressions (as I understand them) are, of course, products of an earlier moment—that of “forced silence,” etc.—a potentially essential swing of the pendulum *away from* Sor Juana’s confessor’s excesses in the opposite direction. I recognize this, and my “critical” uptake of Paz at this point in the study is thus more rhetorical than actual.

[19] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 157.

[20] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 539.

[21] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 557.

[22] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 580.

[23] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 151.

[24] Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral, 581.

[25] Tavard upholds the argument that Sor Juana was silent because she found God’s love in silence: “when speech becomes a hindrance, when one no longer wishes to return to the visible . . . silence offers the only open way” (173). This friar upheld a more traditional viewpoint on silence and vocation at a time when other thinkers chose different perspectives; his nuancing of it—as in the above quote, where he seems to affirm that silence and speech only work *together*—provides

one example of how Roman Catholic scholars retained the emphases of Sor Juana's biographer while permitting others, and thus facilitated a dialectical perspective.

[26] Arenal, E. & Powell, A. (1994). Introduction. In E. Arenal & A. Powell (Eds.), *The Answer / La respuesta: Including a Section of Poems* (pp. 1-37). New York: The Feminist Press, 13.

[27] Of course a dialectal approach allows us to admit that the coexisting choices and stances of human church authorities regarding the *same* silence remain lamentable, whether or not we accept the silence as *also* vocational.

[28] Rhor uses this term of his own coinage to explore his ideas on Christian identity. By it he means avoiding oppositional thinking about "different" things that are actually better off understood as united in mutual relationship with one another.

[29] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *The Answer*, 56.

[30] Rhor, R. (2016, August 17). Seeing with God's Eyes [blog post]. <https://cac.org/seeing-gods-eyes-2016-08-17/>, Retrieved on 11.08.2018.

[31] Paz, O. *Trampas de la fe*, 590.

[32] Rhor, R. (2016, July 10). God Sees in Wholes, We See in Parts [blog post]. <https://cac.org/god-sees-wholes-see-parts-2016-07-10/>, Retrieved on 11.08.2018.

[33] The Bishop of Puebla wrote his thinly disguised admonishment under the pseudonym of a nun. One main reason for this is that he is modelling the same decorum that he wished of Sor Juana: that women address themselves to women and privilege propriety and obedience of authority.

[34] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 47.

[35] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 47.

[36] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 45.

[37] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 40.

[38] Juana uses Arce to defend a lot of what she ultimately argues is legitimate for women including: secular learning, writing in general, sacred learning, female instruction, voicing opinions on theological matters (but not from pulpit / public space), poetry or secular writing, teaching through writing, learning science, and book-learning from men.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 81. Relatedly, in another location Sor Juana casts Vieyra's idea about *finezas* as "opinion," since he goes against Church Fathers, who themselves uphold "the principles of the Holy Faith" (*Ibid.*, p. 93).

[40] Lavrin, A. (1995). Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Obediencia y autoridad en su entorno religioso. *Revista iberoamericana*, LXI [172-73], p. 617. In this article, Lavrin discusses, among other things, how Juana's free will and obedience to authority are at odds: "En la *Carta atenagórica* se ve claramente el punto y contrapunto de la obediencia a la autoridad y la forzosa defensa del libre albedrío, que toma mayor impulso en la *Respuesta*" (615).

[41] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 41. Benefits ("beneficios") is another word for "*finezas*," which are also sometimes called "benefactions" in English.

[42] This letter is the same document in which Sor Juana airs her theological critique of Antonio de Vieira, and to which she responds with *The Answer*.

- [43] The English translations of this letter, indicated by italics, are my own. In the original Spanish: “y que el ponderar sus beneficios [de Dios] no se quede en discursos especulativos, sino que pase a servicios prácticos, para que sus beneficios negativos se pasen a positivos hallando en nosotros digna disposición . . .” (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Carta atenagórica. <https://www.ensayistas.org/antologia/XVII/sorjuana/>. Retrieved on 19.10.2018.
- [44] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 99.
- [45] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 101.
- [46] Rhor says of this fruit of the spirit that “those who agree to carry and love what God loves, both the good and the bad of human history, and to pay the price for its reconciliation within themselves—these are the followers of Jesus. (Rhor, R. [2016, July 27]. Seeing with God’s Eyes [blog post]. <https://cac.org/seeing-gods-eyes-2016-07-27/>, Retrieved on 10.09.2018.
- [47] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 93.
- [48] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 93.
- [49] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 93 & 95.
- [50] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 93.
- [51] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 98.
- [52] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *The Answer*, 46. (The terms referenced in footnotes 48, 51 and 52 are repeated or more semantically approximate in Spanish, suggesting more rhetorical parity than the translation offers.)
- [53] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *The Answer*, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 101.
- [54] In the original Spanish: “que es mejor conocimiento.” (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Carta atenagórica. <https://www.ensayistas.org/antologia/XVII/sorjuana/>.) Retrieved on 10.09.2018.
- [55] The letter ends with some typical rhetorical flourishes: begging pardon for any infelicitous stylistics or lack of respect for her interlocutor. To my mind, this choice, by its relative unimportance, highlights what comes immediately before: theological affirmation of the authority question through Seneca.
- [56] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 103.
- [57] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 103.
- [58] Seneca, De beneficiis. Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3794/3794-h/3794-h.htm>, Retrieved on 10.09.2018.
- [59] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 103.
- [60] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 103.
- [61] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 63.

[62] “For although I did not study in books, I studied all things that God created, taking them for my letters...I declare that all this is so continual in me that I have no need of books.” (Ibid., p. 73 & p. 75).

[63] “For although I did not study in books, I studied all things that God created, taking them for my letters...I declare that all this is so continual in me that I have no need of books.”, 77.

[64] See, for example Paz, Geoff Guevara-Geer, and Stephanie Merrim’s studies (referenced in bibliography).

[65] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 77.

[66] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press, 75.

[67] Sor Juana spent the last years of her life engaged in supposed penance and nursing fellow sisters during an epidemic before falling ill and succumbing to it herself.

[68] In a groundbreaking study on the *Enigmas*, Elias L. Rivers and Georgina Sabat Rivers propose as much: “el amor como tema general.” ([1995]. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: *Los Enigmas* y sus ediciones. *Revista Iberoamericana*, LXI [172-73], 681.

[69] Translation mine. For those who would like to explore this poetry further, an English translation has recently been put out by a chicana poet and translator, Stalina Emanuelle Villareal. (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. [2015.] *Enigmas* [Stalina Emanuelle Villareal, Trans.] United States of America: Ugly Duckling Presse.)

[70] As Nina M. Scott argues, “the problem with [a] hagiographic portrait is that it went against all the nun had stood for before, leaving scholars with a seemingly insoluble puzzle and many conflicting theories...” ([2007.] Scott, N. M., “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Three Hundred Years of Controversy and Counting.” In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau [Eds.]. *Approaches to the Teaching of the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. [pp. 93-200]. New York: MLA.)

[71] Fabr , L. F. (2015.) *Sor Juana y otros monstruos*. United States of America: Ugly Duckling Presse, 5.

Bibliography:

Arenal, E. (2007). “or Juana and Company: Intellectuals and Early Feminists.”, In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, 37-45.

Arenal, E. & Powell, A. (1994). Introduction. In E. Arenal & A. Powell (Eds.), *The Answer / La respuesta: Including a Section of Poems* (pp. 1-37). New York: The Feminist Press.

Bokser, J. A. (2006). Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence. *Rhetoric Review*. 25, 5-21.

Fabr , L. F. (2015.) *Sor Juana y otros monstruos*. United States of America: Ugly Duckling Presse.

Frontjes, R. Silence as Speech: Reading Sor Juana’s *Primero sue o* in Light of her Final Silence. <https://politicalanimalmagazine.com/sor-juana/>, Retrieved on 21.08.2018.

Guevara-Geer, G. The Final Silence of Sor Juana: The Abysmal Remove of her Closing Night. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, 201-208.

Lavrin, A. (1995). Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Obediencia y autoridad en su entorno religioso. *Revista iberoamericana*, LXI [172-73], 605-22.

Maingueneau, D. (2010). Literature and Discourse Analysis. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia, International Journal of Linguistics*, 42[1], 147-57.

Merrim, Stephanie. (1999.) *Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Nashville TN: Vanderbilt.

- Paz, O. (1982). *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Baral.
- Perelmuter, R. (2004). *Los límites de la femineidad en sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Estrategias retóricas y recepción literaria*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 186-92.
- Rhor, R. Daily Meditations [blog]. <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>, Retrieved on 11.08.2018.
- Seneca. *De beneficiis*. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3794/3794-h/3794-h.htm>, Retrieved on 11.08.2018.
- Rivers, E. L. & Sabat-Rivers, G. (1995). Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Los *Enigmas* y sus ediciones. *Revista Iberoamericana*, LXI [172-73], 677-84.
- Scott, Nina M. (2007.) Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Three Hundred Years of Controversy and Counting. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.). *Approaches to the Teaching of the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. (pp. 93-200). New York: MLA.
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. (1994). *The Answer* (Electa Arenal & Amanda Powell, Eds. & Trans.) New York: The Feminist Press.
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Carta atenagórica. Retrieved from <https://www.ensayistas.org/antologia/XVII/sorjuana/>, Retrieved on 10.09.2018.
- Vollendorf, L. (2007). Across the Atlantic: Sor Juana, *La respuesta*, and the Hispanic Women's Canon. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.). *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. (pp. 95-102). New York: MLA.
- Wray, G. (2007.) Sacred Allusions: Theology in Sor Juana's Work. In E. L. Bergman & S. Schlau (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. (pp. 65-76). New York: MLA.

**Сп. „Реторика и комуникации“, брой 37, ноември 2018 г.
Rhetoric and Communications Journal, Issue 37, November 2018**