FINDING A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN:

VERONICA FRANCO AND SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

by

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ABSTRACT

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During the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, both in the Old and the New World, the patriarchal social structure had created a set of fixed gender rules based on gender roles to control female sexuality, female voices, and their social freedom because it was considered a threat to male superiority. The Venetian Veronica Franco and the Mexican Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are two extraordinary women from different places and a hundred years apart who, with their elaborated writing and body-related techniques, escape the gender patriarchal constrains and give voice to their new authorial *persona* in a female liminal environment. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz represent the two facets of the same coin that symbolizes the phallocentric patriarchal structure in which these two women happened to live, struggle, and write. These women were pushed to the margins of society, confined in convents, brothels/patrician houses, or the streets, to silence their *personae* and reinforce their inferiority and, at times, inexistence.

There are no works that focus on the comparison between the well-known Mexican nun and the forgotten Venetian courtesan. Therefore, this dissertation aims to analyze the writings of Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz through the lens of feminist theory (Cixous, Irigaray etc.) and the concept of the body as an instrument of subversion and female liberation. In their respective time and marginal places of confinement (the patrician house and the convent), both women were able to create a liminal space that allowed them to go beyond the rigidity of gender binaries and explore different venues of freedom. In this liminal space both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana stopped "performing" the fixed gender roles imposed by the patriarchal social order and created new female creatures at the margins of patriarchal society; a new type of woman who could, through her body and writing, destabilize the patriarchal gender identities and go from a passive silence object to an active writing subject.

To *zia Bruna* who first "discovered" my inclination toward literature and humanities at a young age…

To *my parents, Rosella* and *Sergio*, and *my brother Luca* who patiently dealt with my craziness and accepted, perhaps with rassignation, that I am, just like Sor Juana, *la peor de todas*…

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INTRODUCTION

Women have worked constantly, always and everywhere,
in every type of society in every part of the world since the beginning of human time.
– Heather Gordon Cremonesi

The Great Goddess is the incarnation of the Feminine Self that
unfolds in the history of mankind as well as in the history
of every individual woman.
– Erich Neumann, The Great Mother

For much of the Western tradition, including the expanse of time framed by the Renaissance and the Baroque (approximately from the 15th century to the 17th century), literary and artistic production was strongly governed by longstanding structures of courtly and royal patronage tightly linked to patriarchal authority and control. This patriarchal authority expanded its rules and control to the city geography and structure, which helped establish misogyny in European culture and abroad. Each period articulated its own strict aesthetical and ethical codes whereas an individual's social class dictated viable avenues of production. In this patronage environment, women and their feminine *personae*, were often subordinated to male authorship and creation.

Yet in this period, many interesting "oeuvres" are testament to female voices that powerfully break through the patriarchal and misogynistic soil. Margaret Rosenthal calls

these first female voices "the other voice," in contrast to the "first voice," "the voice of educated men who created Western Culture" (ix). The "other voice" emerges from the restrictions that women had to face during a "three-thousand years of misogyny" that governed every civilization related to Western culture: Greco-Roman, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. Looking at the views about women in the Western world, one realizes that, historically, the misogyny imbedded in these traditions infiltrated into the medical, intellectual, legal, religious, and socio-economic systems of the Middle Ages, and these ideas will be the ones internalized by women and eventually contested by them.

Greek scientific tradition considered women inferior to men and positioned them only as child-bearers and housekeepers. Aristotle, the father of the ancient Greek philosophy, openly described women as objects and associated them with the inferior principle of nature: "The male principle in nature… is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics, while the female is passive, material and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete" (Jones, Rosenthal x). This concept of male superiority and supremacy over the passive female voice and body was inherited in the ancient medieval tradition, and passed from there to subsequent periods.[1] Women were stigmatized as inferior and objectified as the passive body and soul that needed the male intervention in order to feel complete and "function" in the correct way. According to Aristotle, the male principle was considered superior also in the act of procreation. He believed that man's semen created a new perfect human creature, and that women only participated by offering their body as matter. Also, in the Aristotelian mind and view, the male principle always tried to reproduce the perfect "self" (another male creature); for

[1] One cultural consequence of the Arab invasion of Spain in 711 until 1492 was that a lot of texts that were unknown in Europe came in Arabic from the Arab world and translated into Latin; as it was the case with Aristotle.

this reason, the procreation of a female creature was always considered a mistake. Every female baby that was born embodied the reflection of an imperfect act of generation. "Every female born was considered a 'defective' or 'mutilated' male… a 'monstrosity' of nature" (Jones, Rosenthal x).

The Aristotelian perspective on the inferior nature of women made women as worthless as any other living creature (animals and plants) on the planet. They were regarded as simple and docile objects waiting to be exploited by the powerful, intellectual and active men. Just like Nature, women were affected and dominated by their uterus, the womb, and the passions generated in the "wandering" uterus made women "lustful, deceitful, talkative, irrational… 'hysterical'" (Jones, Rosenthal xi).

Val Plumwood, in her book *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* explores the specific controversy of masculine power in the Western context, and its invocation in voice of limitations on women and nature. Plumwood summarizes thusly: "But both the dominant tradition of [interpreting] men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power" (Plumwood 20). The lot of women was strongly marked by certain experiences and realities, including a shorter life expectancy (due to the danger of childbirth), and the limitations created by worldviews that marked them as mindless inferior human beings. Women absorbed this male-constructed feminine role to varying extents, and the wider culture demanded, and would continue to demand, that women be forced to see and conceive of themselves as inferior creatures.

Around 450 B.C., Roman law, like Greek philosophy, formed medieval thought and shaped medieval society. During Rome's Republican Era male legislators and male family members manipulated the laws regarding dowries, divorce, and inheritance by confirming female subordination. *The paterfamilias*, "father of the family," possessed the complete *patria potestas*, "paternal power," over the women in his house. The term pater, "father," did not necessarily mean biological father, but it portrayed the person who owned the household's property and therefore also its human members. "The *paterfamilias*[2] had absolute power –including the power, rarely exercised, of life or death –over his wife, his children, and his slaves, as much as over his cattle" (*Poems and Selected Letters* xii). Under this law, females could never emancipate, differently from male children, and passed from the hands of their fathers to the ones of their husbands; or, if widowed or orphaned without being married, to a male guardian or a tutor. During the later Republic and the Roman Imperial period, some rules were changed and women were able to marry according to the new form of "free marriage," in which a woman could remain under her father's authority, possess property (usually her own dowry), and inherit from her father. Despite some changes and an initial female freedom, women were still suffering enormous restrictions and constraints that later developed into the Christian doctrine and teachings.

The Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament segregated women to the realm of family and stained their *persona* with the guilt of the original sin. The Genesis narrative made Eve responsible for the Fall and all its consequences: she instigated, she deceived Adam, therefore she suffered the greatest punishment. Also, her great

[2] This same figure remains in the Renaissance and beyond as the "domestic monarch" (Donzelot). A master-like figure that expects women to obey in his household and rules like a monarch over his subjects.

disobedience was the cause of the sacrifice of Jesus who, with his death on a cross, released humanity from the original sin. Consequently, many educated women of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance –such as Hildegard Von Biden (1098-1179) and Isotta Nogarola (the first Italian female humanist, 1418-66) –started from the image of Eve in order to develop their defense of women, by reconstructing the creation of Adam and Eve and by taking away Eve's blame.

Looking at the process of misogyny itself, one can say that the patriarchal socio-economic structure went through the Hegelian process of mind (between the lord and the bondsman) in which the unconscious decides that the man is the unique "self" and the woman is the inferior "other."

> … the master gets his recognition through an other consciousness, for in them the latter affirms itself as unessential, both by working upon the thing, and, on the other hand, by the fact of being dependent on a determinate existence; in neither case can this other get the mastery over existence, and succeed in absolutely negating it. We have thus here this moment of recognition… that the other consciousness cancels itself as self-existent, and, *ipso facto,* itself does what the first does to it. In the same way we have the other moment, that this action on the part of the second is the action proper of the first; for what is done by the bondsman is properly an action on the part of the master. (Hegel 191)

Another way of approaching women's position in the patriarchal structure is that the construction of the female "other," and inferior has been built upon the logic of colonization: women were the first "other" human being that men had to face and,

eventually, take distance from in order to define their own "selves." Albert Memmi, in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized,* explains how the colonizer goes through a double reconstruction of himself; he finally defines himself as the master by a process of exclusions against the other:

> The mechanism of this remolding of the colonized… consists, in the first place, in a series of negations. The colonized is not this, is not that…He is never considered in a positive light; or if he is, then the quality which is conceded is the result of a psychological or ethical failing. (Memmi 83-4)

Memmi 's explanation naturalizes domination, making it seem to be part of nature. For this reason, man (the master) defines himself by exclusion, against the woman (the other) and needs to maintain hierarchies in order to define its identity. In the same historical and cultural context, Simone de Beauvoir describes how men construct their identities based on the opposition to the women and their beings:

> Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being… she is defined and differentiated with reference to a man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute –she is the Other. (de Beauvoir 52)

Here, Beauvoir posits women as the "other," everything the "perfect" man is not. The man depends on women to define his own identity and "the organization of the material life;" however this relation is not mutual, equal, nor equally relational (Plumwood 52). Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* is one of the essential works in defense of women of the 20th century; however, throughout time, other women

writers contested their inequality. Taking the ideas about the inferiority of the female kind received from the Western tradition, women, as early as the fourteenth century (Christine de Pizan, 1364-1430) argued for a revision of women's position in society in what is named *La querelle des femmes*, which will be continued later by Renaissance and Baroque "proto-feminist" writers, such as the ones that are the subjects of this dissertation.

The Venetian Veronica Franco and the Mexican Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are two extraordinary women from different places and a hundred years apart who, with their elaborated writing, escape the patriarchal gender constrains and are able to construct their female authorial *personae*. They are intelligent, beautiful, and strong-minded women who manipulate and subvert the patriarchal socio-economic structure in order to go from passive objects to active subjects. Both women emerge in their life and writings as the "other voice" in a time in which women were considered to be second-rate human beings in comparison to men. According to Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret Rosenthal, this "other voice" was a powerful voice of protest that silently stated the equality (or even superiority) of women over men in their essential nature (moral, spiritual, and intellectual).[3] Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz represent, in my research, the two facets of the same coin that symbolizes the phallocentric patriarchal structure in which these two women happened to live, struggle, and write. The phallocentric patriarchal structure created a system of rules to regulate gender and control female

[3] "The other voice, a voice of protest, was mostly female… It spoke in the vernaculars and in Latin, in the treatises and dialogues, plays and poetry, letters and diaries and pamphlets. It battered at the wall of misogyny beliefs that encircled women and raised a banner announcing its claim… Women were capable of higher education, of holding position of power and influence in the public realm, and of speaking and writing persuasively" (*Poems and Selected Letters* xxv-vi).

sexuality. As we observed before, during the Renaissance and Baroque, the regulated and normalized woman was the one that, with the help of a dowry – a male created system of exchange, – was able to get married, bear children, and live "happily" under the patriarchal power of a husband that she did not choose. This was the preferred position for a high to middle class woman in a phallocentric male structure; however, during these periods many women could not be positioned in a house, under the patronage of one man, and restricted to house work and child-bearing, so they were doubly excluded. A question arose in the patriarchal controlling mind: What should we do with other women? How can they be normalized outside of marriage life? What could be the perfect position to restrict their bodies and regulate their female sexuality outside marriage? The answer came along "quickly" and patriarchy created two other avenues for women since they did not want to enter marriage or did not have enough money or a dowry to give to a man for marriage and protection: prostitution and the religious life.

Women have been seen as objects that patriarchy could move around in their male-centered world, cities, and environment. "Objectification and alienation take place when we [women] are locked into the male-centered, monodimensional foreground" (*Gyn/Ecology* 3). According to Mary Daly, Patriarchy perpetrated its deceiving rules through myth and religion by creating a set of female roles that women could mirror in life: Eve as the sinner, the deceiver, the prostitute, and the Virgin Mary as the chaste, the immaculate, a woman who dedicates her life to Christ/God. For this reason, the prostitute and the religious woman differ from the "normal" married woman and represent the two facets of the same coin of patriarchal regulation; a regulation that aims to control female sexuality (which, according to Daly, is one of the deepest fears of the patriarchal men).

The prostitute and the religious woman are marginalized women, sexually normalized under phallocentric patriarchal power.

Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz represent these two "other" categories of women during the Renaissance and the Baroque of the Indies; one is a courtesan in the Republic of Venice, while the other one is a peculiar religious woman in the colonial New Spain. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana are the two marginalized facets of the same coin (patriarchy) separated from an ocean and a hundred years. "Patriarchy appears to be 'everywhere.' Even outer space and the future have been colonized… Nor does this colonization exists simply 'outside' of women's mind, securely fastened into institution…" (*Gyn/Ecology* 1). The creation of patriarchy and its colonization of the world connect these two women out of time and space and create a sense of sisterhood and love for women that has always been in the air, in a Bhabha-like liminal space,[4] but could never materialize. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in their marginalized positions and liminal spaces, emerge from their silence and, in the white space of their pages, are able to challenge and eventually subvert the patriarchal restrictions and binary gender system. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, by using a male instrument and technique (the pen and writing) are able to materialize that womanhood that never existed in a male-centered world. Through their writings, they are able to find a space of freedom and self-authorization, a liminal space that will allow them to give value not only to themselves, but also to women as thinking subjects (and not as objects, as women were conceived by a male phallocentric view). In their liminal space of literary freedom, they are able to think, decide their own life, and, eventually, re-

[4] In post-colonial theory, Bhabha created the term "liminal space" to determine the space in which the negotiation of cultural identities happens. The "liminal space" is a hybrid site that witnesses the production and exchange of cultural meanings.

invert the position/conception of male superiority and female inferiority by *destabilizing* the male interlocutors, their voice, authority, and gender identity.

Veronica Franco (Venice, 1546- 91) was a famous courtesan and poet of the sixteenth century. During her time, in the Republic of Venice, two types of courtesans existed in order to give pleasures to the vast category of man, from the elite to the poor: the "cortigiana onesta" (the "honorable"[5] courtesan), an intellectual, and a politically involved prostitute whose clients were from the upper educated class; and the "cortigiana di lume," a low class prostitute who provided her services in the area of "Ponte di Rialto." "To succeed as a courtesan, a woman needed to be beautiful, sophisticated in her dress and manners, and an elegant, cultivated conversationalist. If she demonstrated her intellectual powers in writing and publishing poetry and prose, so much better" (Jones, Rosenthal 1). Veronica Franco made her living by agreeing to sexual relations with the Venice elite, as well as other important travellers like merchants, ambassadors, and kings to create a web of power relations. The prostitution in this century was strongly regulated by rigid geographic laws that allowed Venice to shine all around as one of the most organized and articulated cities in the peninsula. In her book *The Honest Courtesan*, Margaret Rosenthal describes the city of Venice and the various types of prostitution:

> The danger perceived in unrestrained female sexuality might be the catalyst behind the extreme regulations and geographic restrictions

[5] There are various English translations for the word and concept of "cortigiana onesta." In her book, Margaret Rosenthal prefers the word "honest;" however, when she collaborates with Ann Rosalind Jones, they use the adjective "honored" that also refers to the translation used for the catalogue of the most famous courtesans of Venice: *Catalogue of All the Principal and most Honored Courtesans of Venice* (1565). I prefer and will be using the word "honorable" to refer to the "cortigiana onesta;" the word "honorable" comes from the Latin *honorate*, "The *cortigiane honorate*, or upper class courtesans, were extremely well educated," as Laura Anna Stortoni explains in her book (XIX).

> Venetian authorities imposed on prostitutes, making their profession 'the most legal and strictly controlled aspect of this culture.' Notwithstanding the existence of five or six categories of prostitutes, from the lowest to the educated and refined "cortigiane oneste." (23)

Veronica Franco is considered one of the most influential "cortigiane oneste" of the sixteenth century and the most popular in the history of Venice. She was initiated and instructed to be a courtesan from her own mother, Paola Fracassa, who was a courtesan herself. The names of Veronica Franco and her mother appear together in the *Catalogue of All the Principal and most Honored Courtesans of Venice* (1565), " a list of the names, addresses, and fees of well-known prostitutes in the city" (Jones, Rosenthal 2). The Republic of Venice was a very peculiar place, different and separated from any other cities in Italy of that time and, with time, the view of Venice as a Republic was as idealized as the courtesan profession: a city of social freedom and tolerance. "The honest courtesan, according to this perspective, not only embodied a city immersed in luxury, spectacle, disguise, commercialization, voluptuousness, and sensuality but also had a hand in bringing about the republic's subsequent decline" (Rosenthal 3).

In her life, Veronica taught herself how to read and write because it was prohibited for women to have any literary education. Hiding from her mother and other women, Veronica acquired a vast amount of books and a literary culture that emerges strongly in her writings. Using this literary education, she was able to defend herself from those men who accused and criticized her while, perhaps, hiding, behind their pen and paper, a deep fear of Franco's *persona*. Throughout her short life, Veronica Franco wrote in different genres, from her "Capitoli" in verses, *Terze Rime*, to various letters that

would expose her personal life to a public sphere. Margaret Rosenthal explains how Veronica Franco differed from the other courtesans by having other types of "gifts" besides the one of giving pleasure to men:

> The *cortigiana onesta*, unlike the common prostitute whose favors were strictly sexual, projected a highly sophisticated public image intended to gain her entry into the aristocratic circle of Venetian public life. Even her dress mimicked the splendor of the noble-woman. (232)

The "cortigiane oneste" were not only viewed as bodies for the physical pleasure of men, but were also highly educated. They were able to talk about politics, as well as easily defend themselves in a debate about social issues, economics and, of course, literature. Thus Veronica Franco in her writings often describes the power of women (as she does in the epigraph with which I opened this introduction) not only in the literary field, but also in the battlefield. A woman can "fight" as strongly as a man; she can be as delicate and sensible, as resilient and dangerous. Franco's writings functioned as "propaganda" for all those women who, like herself, had been silenced and needed to stand up, scream for their rights, and reclaim their stolen identities.

A century later and on the other side of the Atlantic, lived another woman who, like Veronica Franco, would impact the defense of women, but from a different standpoint. Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana, known as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Mexico, 1648/1651-95) was a religious woman and writer of the Baroque of the Indies (*Barroco de Indias* –the manifestation of the Baroque in the Americas). She learned how to read and write as a small child at a time when it was rare for women to read and write unless they undertook the religious life and vocation, or belonged to the

high class (the Spaniards and the *criollos*) and she had a teacher (called "amiga"). In fact, the Roman Catholic Church, in Western Europe, "offered an alternative to the career of wife and mother. A woman could enter a convent parallel in function to the monasteries for men that evolved in the early Christian century" (*Poems and Selected Letters* xvi), and that was the case both in Western Europe and in the colonies. It is well documented that "A convent was the only place in her society where a woman could decently live alone and devote herself to learning" (Arenal, Powell 3). Sor Juana in the *Respuesta a sor Filotea de la Cruz* describes how she learned how to read and write when she was only three years old. One day, she went with her sister to a tutor, called "Amiga," and convinced the teacher that she could also have access to scholarly education.

> … digo que no había cumplido los tres años de mi edad cuando enviando mi madre a una hermana mía, mayor que yo, a que se enseñase a leer en una de las que llaman Amigas, me llevó a mi tras de ella el cariño y la travesura, y viendo que le 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. (49)
>
> … I declare I was not yet three years old when my mother sent off one of my sisters, older than I, to learn to read in one of those girls' schools that they call *Amigas*. Affection and mischief carried me after her; and when I saw that they were giving her lessons, I so caught fire with the desire to learn that, deceiving the teacher (or so I thought), I told her that my mother wanted her to teach me also. (49)

Sor Juana was only three years old when she felt this strong love and desire towards *las letras*, the literary world and education, an education that she pursued all of her life, even when, under the supervision of her Father confessor and the Mother Superior, she finally signed (with her own blood) the contract to permanently end her literary activity. However, Sarah Herrera Poot in *Los guardaditos de Sor Juana*, unfolds her love for the humanities and unmasks other writings of Sor Juana that were supposedly written after the famous agreement to end her career: *La carta de Serafina de Cristo* and *Los enigmas* for the Portuguese nuns of the "Casa del placer." Sor Juana, a religious woman, was driven throughout her life by her desire for *las letras* and her love for education. She was able to manipulate the male-made rhetoric in order to use it for her own defense and in favor of women. Sor Juana's fabulous rhetoric and the great amount of literary works that she produced throughout her life, made her the recipient of various epitomes, such as "the Mexican Phoenix" and "the Tenth Muse," that immortalize her as one of the most important women writers and authors of all times.

Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were a product of the Greco-Roman tradition that was part of the Western world in which Veronica Franco lived and that Sor Juana, consequently inherited. As mentioned previously, the classic and Judeo-Christian view had long depicted women as inferior to men on the basis of their nature and supported it with scientific texts and theories. It is no surprise that "women's nature", then, would be a significant aspect of any women's defense, as will be seen in Veronica Franco and Sor Juana since they were responding to the views about women held in their times. Both authors have been subjects of monographs by themselves and also in comparison with other writers. In the case of Veronica Franco, Ann Rosalind Jones

includes her to the collection of European women poets of the Renaissance and Baroque, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620,* and Margaret Rosenthal gives an analysis of her writings accompanied by documents, letters, and a detailed biography. Rosenthal is one of the scholars who decided to assemble women voices (Veronica Franco, Moderata Fonte, Vittoria Colonna etc.) in a collection called "the other voice," "… a voice of protest, was mostly female, but also male. It spoke in vernaculars and in Latin, in treatises and dialogues, plays and poetry, letters and diaries and pamphlets" (*Poems and Selected Letters* xxv).

Looking at Sor Juana, besides an extensive bibliography on her life and works (Octavio Paz, Georgina Sabat Rivers, Sarah Poot Herrera, Margot Glantz etc.), she has also been the subject of comparative works like Stephanie Merrim's *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz,* in which she is compared to the women writers of *La querelle*, Maria de Zayas and others; and *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico,* in which Jean Franco considers many women writers in Mexico and their female discourse, from the mystic nuns of the seventeenth century and the accounts of the *ilusas* of New Spain, to the modern Mexican female writers/artists of the last century (Frida Kahlo, Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska etc.). Jean Franco includes Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz among these other women as symbols, prototypes, or, simply, women who, with their discursive attitude, have caused great changes in the canonical conception of women and their position and space of expression in society. However, to my knowledge, there is no work that studies Veronica Franco and Sor Juana together as the two faces of the same coin; two women restricted and governed by a panoptical phallocentric patriarchal rule which constrains them in the two marginalized positions for

women (prostitution or the religious life). Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz use their body as a literary instrument to be and will find, in their physical marginalization, a "room" and a liminal space of their own in which they will be able to escape restrictions, write, manipulate, and eventually subvert the misogynistic view of women by *destabilizing* the patriarchal gender lines and identities of their male interlocutors, Maffio Venier and the Archbishop of Puebla respectively.

In the first Chapter called "The Pen and The Confinement: Destabilizing Gender Binaries," I will examine the ancient philosophical history (Aristotle) and the consequent *Querelle des Femmes* to explain how women have been connected to nature and its unpredictability, and the way in which they have, in turn, always fought for the right to express and give a voice to their objectified bodies. Patriarchy had organized rules and behaviors for women to follow, such as marriage, religious life, or prostitution, in order to tame their sexuality and customize them to male submission and pleasure. According to Mary Daly, patriarchy was able to control female sexuality and perpetuate its rules through myth and religion (for example: the Bible and its female models, women roles in society, and the structure of the city), so that women could be restricted to specific places (the house, the convent, and the brothel or patrician environments) and serve in the phallocentric patriarchal structure. However, the prostitute had been presented as a sexual being, a sinner who would infect men with her untamed sexuality: "Women who succumbed to their weak and sinful natures held the power of evil, it was believed; and when they lost their fear and timidity, there was no one stronger or less afraid, or more infused with power to seduce, ensnare, and infect" (Perry 8). I will be reconstructing the social and political image of women from ancient Greek philosophy (Aristotle) to

medieval canons (the *Bible*) to demonstrate how these ancient beliefs are rooted in common ideologies, how they echo both in the secular and religious backgrounds, and how Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, despite a hundred years distance, represent the two facets of the same coin. Patriarchy was the moving force, the coin that regulated female sexuality through time and space. Women did not have much choice: they could be *normalized* wives, passing from their fathers to their husbands as an object of exchange; or they could become prostitutes/courtesans subjugated to male pleasure, or they could enter a convent and dedicate their life to Christ and to chastity. I will be looking at Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz as these two facets of the same coin (the patriarchy) and at how they have been restricted in different times and spaces into their marginalized female positions. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana, in their respective confinements (courtesanry and religious life), will create a liminal space of literary freedom in which they will stop performing the fixed patriarchal gender binaries imposed on them, generate a new woman/creature, and, eventually destabilize the gender identities of the two male interlocutors who came in contact with them. In this space of *liminality* between their matriarchal environment and the outside patriarchal social order, they will both write and re-write *themselves*, as Cixous explains in her article *The Laugh of The Medusa*: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies –for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal" (875). Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz will put themselves into the text, "as into the world and into history," and they will create their own movement and a long lasting legacy of women writers (*The Laugh of The Medusa* 875).

My second Chapter, "The Pen as Sword: Veronica Franco and the Courtesan's Body," will focus on Veronica Franco from her life as an "honorable" courtesan to her writings. I will give a background on the history of prostitution and the *mestiere di cortigiana* (the courtesan job) in the Republic of Venice to enter the life and works of one of the most famous courtesans in Italian history. Veronica Franco was a "cortigiana onesta" and she made a living by using her body. Her female body will materialize in her writings and will reclaim that body weight that has been assigned to women for years from Greek philosophy to medieval ideologies (man = reason/spirit, woman = body/nature), a body that with its weight cast women away from education and subjugated them to male power. Moreover, the body takes on a different connotation for Franco and its weight will liberate her voice through her writing (as a Cixous-*avant-la-letre*); Veronica Franco will use her profession and her body weight as a writing technique to accept her marginality, create a powerful liminal space of female freedom, subvert the patriarchal power order, and destabilize her male interlocutor (Maffio Venier) by disintegrating his male gender identity, masculine authority and voice into the "incerto autore" (the unknown author).

In Chapter Three, "I Dream *Ergo Sum*: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and her androgynous-self," I will consider Sor Juana's life and her writing techniques. Sor Juana cannot be classified into one genre or type of writing, as she was a prodigy: she wrote her first poem when she was eight years old and, since then, she never stopped writing. She had a deep love for the humanities, a love that shows in her different literary works, which go from poetry to philosophical letters, and from theatrical plays to argumentative *loas*. Sor Juana, maybe influenced by the newborn philosophy of Descartes (*Cogito Ergo Sum*), will pursue her love for knowledge through the abyss of the androgynous mind

(*Primero sueño* and "Respondiendo a un caballero de Perú"); an androgynous mind that hides behind an androgynous body, the body of a Mexican nun who lived in the court, refused many marriages, and had a rigorous love for knowledge (something to which women could not aim). Sor Juana uses "androgyny" as a writing technique in order to break her silence, fight against the patriarchal gender socio-economical constrains, and, finally, to destabilize the gender hierarchy and name of the Archbishop of Puebla into Sor Filotea de la Cruz.

> But as silence is a negative thing, though it explains a great deal through the very stress of not explaining, we must assign some meaning to it that we may understand what the silence is intended to say, for if not, silence will say nothing, as that is its very office: to *say nothing. (Poems, Protest, and A Dream* 7)

Both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana fought for their rights in their writings and, at the same time, included the surrounding community of women equally oppressed by the patriarchal socio-economic structure. They saw the importance of education in women's lives in order to allow them to stand up, fight for their own rights, and reclaim their real nature and their stolen *personae*. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are two of the few women who, during their times, broke their silence by exposing on paper their desires and capacity to be equal to men, pushed themselves to the limit of their marginal matriarchal confinements, and, indeed, that is an effort worthy of comparison.

CHAPTER ONE

The Pen and The Confinement: Destabilizing Gender Binaries

Give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days.

– Virginia Woolf

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.

– Simone de Beauvoir

"Did women have a Renaissance?" is the important question that Joan Kelly posed a decade ago; a question that has led many to re-examine and rethink not only that particular period, but also some of the previous societies and eras (like the Medieval Ages). In her essay, Kelly examined courtly love literature, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (The Courtier), and the experience of Italian upper-class women to answer the question with a big "no." Medieval and Renaissance women were shadowy figures, "existing only in the periphery of history and in the margins of literary culture" (Rose xiii). Kelly primarily used descriptive literature written by men to make her point, even if a lot of women voices from the period indicate that they were aware of their inferior situation.

While male writers, officials, theologians, workers, and professionals were attempting to limit women's activity to the private realm, some women started to object to this growing constraint and spoke to defend women's right to a public role, which will come to be known as the *Querelle de Femmes*. Italian humanists would occasionally allow women some rational ability while restricting the avenues by which a woman could develop her capacity. It was only in a religious sense that the word "free" was applied to women during the Renaissance.

> According to Erasmus, a woman had the same "free will," the same moral responsibility to do good, that a man did. According to Luther, of course, no one had free will, but a woman could receive God's grace and come to faith the same as a man, participating thereby in the "freedom of a Christian" which resulted from this faith. (Rose 3)

For women, the word "freedom" meant the ability to participate in public life, to enjoy the same rights and privileges of a citizen and possess an education and capacity for reasoning (neither of which was possible for them). Little by little, women started to notice the limitations of what was considered "public" and what "private," and broke the silence by recognizing their *personae* among a world controlled by patriarchy. The patriarchal system created a complex web of hierarchical relationships that transformed sexual, social, and economic relations and dominated all systems of ideas. Women lacked recognition in a society in which the patriarchal metaphors of gender constructed the male as the norm and the female as deviant; "the male as a whole and powerful; the female unfinished, physically mutilated and emotionally dependent" (Rose 3). The work of Joan Kelly, a pioneering feminist historian, is only the beginning of a multi-faceted

and on-going study on female identity which has required an interdisciplinary perspective, through time and space, on predominant gender and sexual ideologies and on women's social, economic, political, and religious activities from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period, and which benefited from incorporating women's presence in the Colonial world.

As restrictions on women increased over time, a few women started to recognize that their situation and circumstances were the result of their sex and its connotations; in other words, it could be seen as the beginning of feminist analysis and an awakening of a feminist consciousness. In the next few chapters, I will analyze the history of misogyny and how women happen to be seen negatively and blamed for the original sin through the image of Eve. This attitude resulted in many writings and "manifestos" against women and their lustful and immoderate way of living. However, during the early fifteenth century, the first female movement, the *Querelle de femmes* (the debate on women) came to life and aimed to defend women's values and their *personae* against patriarchal misogyny. Throughout the years women grew stronger and used their writings to manipulate, challenge, and eventually subvert the patriarchal social order and its gender binaries.

HSTORICAL MISOGYNY AND WOMEN CONSCIUSNESS

Women had always struggled to form their own consciousness in a world dominated by patriarchal hegemony in thought, values, institutions, and resources. The classic and Judeo-Christian tradition which is at the base of Western thought was misogynistic and limited women's lives and their socio-political actions. From the philosophical and medical theories of the ancient Greeks to the civil legislation inherited

by the Romans in continuing with the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. Greek biology presumed that women were inferior to men and presented them only as child-bearers and housekeepers. This view on women was mostly guided by Aristotle's philosophy.

Aristotle thought in dualities; he determined that the male principle was of superior quality, while the female one was inferior. "The male principle in nature is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics, while the female is passive, material, and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete" (Barnes 1:328). The superiority of the male principle also exceeded in the womb in which man's semen, Aristotle believed, was responsible for the formation of a new human being, while the female body contributed only in matter, by carrying the baby.[6]

Simone de Beauvoir reminded us that history had played a big role in giving men concrete powers to keep woman in a state of dependency: "their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other" (159). Women have been stigmatized by society and forced into a role (and different controlled roles) that did not belong to them.

> One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (de Beauvoir 283).

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[6] The later Greek physician Galen believed that there was a female component in the creation of another human creature, called "female semen." However, the followers of Aristotle and Galen saw the male role in reproduction more active and important. The knowledge of the ovum, and the other facts of human embryology were established only in the seventeenth century.

Women are the "other" and they are everything the "perfect" man is not. The man depends on women to define his own identity and "the organization of the material life;" however this relation is not mutual, equal, or equally relational (Plumwood 52). The socially inferior nature of women made them as worthless as any other living creature (animals and plans) on the planet. Following the Aristotelian dualities, women were regarded as simple and docile objects waiting to be exploited by the powerful, intellectual and active man. Just like Nature, women were affected and dominated by their uterus (the womb); this strong connection and the passions generated in the uterus made women "lustful, deceitful, talkative, irrational… 'hysterical'" (Jones, Rosenthal xi). For this reason, according to Val Plumwood, the masculine power was confirmed and used to limit the affirmation of both women and nature. "But both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power" (20).

In the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud re-elaborated Aristotle's theory on the inferiority of women and their completion by pairing with a superior male creature. According to Freud's study on sexuality, woman is an incomplete man who needs to succumb to the envy of the penis that culminates in the desire to be a male entity (Barnes 800). The "penis envy" and the "castration complex" were compensated by the birth of a child or by the union with a man through the sexual act. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in the twentieth century, women are still considered inferior to men and complete only if they reach the union with the opposite sex (by eliminating their constant penis envy with intercourse, and eventually the birth of a child). Also, going back to the

Aristotelian view, the male principle only sought to reproduce itself: the creation of a female being was considered a mistake. Every female born was considered "defective" or a "mutilated" male, a "monstrosity" of nature (Barnes 1:1144). The Aristotelian theory of gender binaries further stated that female psychology was affected by women's dominant organ, the uterus, called *hysteria* in Greek. "The passions generated by the womb made women lustful, deceitful, talkative, irrational, indeed –when these affects were in excess – 'hysterical'" (Jones, Rosenthal x). Aristotle's interpretation of biology supported male preeminence and regulated the social and political laws, not only of the public environment, but also of the household. By considering the male principle superior, men should be rulers, while women must be subordinates.[7]

The Greek philosophical tradition, together with the Roman law that followed,[8] became the basis for medieval thought and shaped medieval society. The Dominican scholastic philosopher Thomas Aquinas, among other thinkers, echoed Aristotle's views on human reproduction, male and female personalities, and he also focused on the supremacy of the male role in the social and political hierarchy. Aquinas wrote positively about women's important job as mothers by stating: "despise not yourselves, women, the

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[7] Plato, Aristotle's teacher, suggested that men and women possessed the same privileges and virtues. However, the setting for his proposal was the ideal Republic that Plato creates in the dialogue that takes the same name (*The Republic*). In this imaginary society, all distinctions of class and gender dissolved. Therefore, without households and properties, there is no need for the subordination of women. Women are to be educated at the same level as men in order for them to assume leadership abilities and responsibilities.

[8] During Rome's Republican era (around 450 B.C.E.) the *paterfamilias* ("father of the family") possessed *patria potestas* ("paternal power"). The term pater ("father") in both cases does not necessarily mean biological father, but householder. The father was the one who owned the household's property and its human members. The *paterfamilias* had absolute power (including the power of life and death) over his wife, his children, his slaves, and his cattle. During the Roman period and under Roman law women suffered a great disability: heirs belonged only to the father, never to the mother. "Women had only a private existence, and no public personality" (Jones, Rosenthal xiii).

son of God was born of woman" (*Summa Theologica*, 3a, qu. 3, art. 4) thus, he elevated motherhood as the only route a woman could use toward the Divine, while he firmly held woman to be innately inferior by God's design. Consequently, the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament enclosed women in to the realm of the family and stigmatized them with the guilt of the original sin. However, *The Genesis* presents two creation narratives:[9] Christian theologians relied principally on the second passage for their understanding of the relationship that was meant-to-be between men and women, interpreting the Creation of Eve from Adam's rib as proof of women's subordination to men.

> So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called a Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." (Genesis 2:21-23)

The creation story in Genesis 2 leads to the one on temptation in Genesis 3 and the consequent blame on Eve for the Original Sin. Eve was tempted by the serpent ("Now the serpent was craftier than any other wild animal the Lord God had made" [Genesis 3:1] and then she went on to deceive her own husband, Adam. As read by Christian theologians from Tertullian to Thomas Aquinas, this narrative made Eve responsible for

[9] The first creation passage in the Genesis reads like this: God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

the Original Sin, the Fall and its consequences.[10] "She instigated the act; she deceived her husband; she suffered the greater punishment. Her disobedience made it necessary for Jesus to be incarnated and to die on the cross" (Jones, Rosenthal xiii). Biblical passages by later writers also viewed women as inferior and tried to teach them to "learn in silence with all submissiveness" (Timothy 2:9-15), as a consequence for being responsible for the Fall and the sin over humanity. Other texts, among them the later Epistles (Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22-23) defined women as the weaker sex, and highlighted their subordination to their husbands. These passages from the *New Testament* became the foundation used by theologians of the early Church to transmit negative attitudes toward women in the medieval Christian culture.[11]

According to Simone de Beauvoir, the biological and economic situation of primitive orders and, later on, Christian values led to male supremacy. "It is because humanity puts itself into question in its being… that man has set himself as master over woman; man's project is not to repeat himself in time: it is to reign over the instant and to forge the future… and it has subjugated Nature and Woman" (75). Woman was considered the "Other," a creature different from men, yet subordinate to them. De

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[10] In the Second century, Tertulian (A.D. 160-225) expressed misogynistic ideas while speaking about the image of Eve: "You are the devil. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law… On account of your desert, that is death, even the son of God had to die" (Ruether 157). Two hundred years later, Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, stated that Eve was more to blame for the Fall than Adam because, even after realizing her sin she kept on tempting him: "She ought not… to have made her husband a partaker of the evil of which she was conscious…. She sinned therefore with forethought" (Miles 91). In the fifth century, San Augustine of Hippo argued that woman was created only in God's "likeness" not image; for this reason, she was weaker than man and more likely to sin. "… even before her sin, woman had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subjected to him" (Miles 96).

[11] Theologians like Tertullian ("On the apparel of Women"), Jerome (*Against Jovinian*), and Augustine (*The Literal Meaning if Genesis*).

Beauvoir dedicated an entire chapter of *The Second Sex* to Christian ideology and its role in women's oppression: "… a religion where the flesh is cursed, the woman becomes the devil's most fearsome temptation" (104). Woman is cursed from Tertullian and Saint Ambrose to Saint John Chrysostom.

The bad reputation of women was visible, not only in the Christian tradition, but also in popular culture and oral tradition. For example, we encounter the same woman blaming in a popular poem written by a medieval Irish poet who had Eve speaking in her own words:

> I am Eve, the wife of noble Adam; it was I who violated Jesus in the past; it was I who robbed my children of heaven; it is I by right who should have been crucified… It was I who plucked the apple… there would be no hell, there would be no grief, there would be no terror but for me. (Greene, O'Connor 158)

Both Latin (mostly developed in the religious and scholarly realms) and vernacular literary traditions portrayed female nature and women's role infused with misogyny. From the medieval "courtly love"[12] to Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio* (1355), women were lustful and deceitful while trying to represent good housewives, housekeepers, or devoted nuns. During the peek of courtly literature, two French authors composed the *Roman de la rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*) – Guillaume de Loris wrote the initial version in 1235 and Jean de Meun added some verses around 1265. Both versions of the *Romance* are

[12] The literary movement of "courtly love," that started in Southern France around the twelfth century, was the erotic love between a nobleman and a noblewoman, the latter usually superior in rank and belonging to another man. Therefore, this love was always adulterous (in a physical or platonic way). The modern Western notion of romantic love derived from the conventions of "courtly love."

dream visions. In the first part, composed by de Loris, the poet longs to pick one rose (a symbolism for woman's virginity) but the thorns around it prevent him from succeeding in his mission, even with the help of the God of Love. The second and longer part, added by de Meun, presents allegorical characters giving long dialectic speeches as social satires on a variety of themes, including the subject of women. The poetic voice goes from a more general statement –that all women are greedy and manipulative and that marriage is a miserable state –to a more specific one: pretty women are lustful, ugly ones exist to please men, and a chaste woman is as rare as a black swan.

In another popular anti-woman manifesto, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio* (1355), the former husband of Boccaccio's lover appears to him in a dream to condemn the immoderate lust and the many defects of women.[13] At the end of his work, Boccaccio is cured from his desires and concludes by stating "how much men naturally surpass women in nobility" (71). From Greek and Roman tradition to religious medieval thought, women were considered a separate category of being, inferior to men and inclined to every vice –as explained in the *Roman de la Rose*. These traditionally negative attitudes toward women restricted them from seeking professional opportunities in the courtly and intellectual world. "Learning was for men, not for daughters, wives, and mothers" (Anderson and Zinsser 2:83). However, in early fifteenth century, Europe's privileged and educated men allowed and encouraged some women to join the intellectual movement called Humanism. For this reason, women started to read, write, and translate critical texts of the classical and early Christian tradition. Consequently

[13] The Italian tradition started by Boccaccio inspired Alfonso Martínez de Toledo to write his work *Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho* (published in 1498) which represents another medieval anti-feminist manifesto.

another movement started to arise along with Humanism: the first feminist movement called *la querelle de femmes* (the debate on women), which started changing the lives of many European women. The *querelle* was a literary and philosophical debate about the value of women that continued sporadically from the beginning of the fifteenth century until the eighteenth century.

Many historians have traditionally traced the development of a *feminist consciousness*[14] in the nineteenth century by connecting it to the development of the women's rights movement. However, historians of Women's History began to trace a much earlier development of feminist activity and thought. Some have it start in the seventeenth century with the work of English writers, such as Mary Astell, Bathsua Makin, Aphra Behn; while others claimed its origin with the work of the fifteenth century Italo-French author Christine de Pizan. The development of *feminist consciousness*, as Gerda Lerner describes it, was a rough journey that involved, not only a discovery, but also the creation of a way that could help escape the surrounding patriarchy which appeared to be everywhere, securely fastened in people's minds and institutions. She defines "female consciousness:"

> … as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination. (14)

[14] Gerda Lerner defines "feminist consciousness" in her book *The Creation of Female Consciousness* (1993).

Women over time have been struggling with female stereotypes and gender restrictions, but some women such as writers Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz participated in creating a female consciousness and new literary ways to challenge the patriarchal social order.

a. Between the Madonna and Eve

After the Counter Reformation, women's roles became more restrictive and the most powerful symbols and legends to prescribe gender ideals came from religion: Eve (the sinner), Mary (the Virgin Mother), and Mary Magdalene (the deviant woman who repented and followed the Virgin ideals). "Mary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had become a passive, asexual figure of compassion, far different from earlier versions of this symbol" (Perry 37). Geoffrey Ashe and other scholars believed that the veneration of the Virgin Mary had developed out of a pre-Christian worship of a mother-goddess (7-32). The Christian religion had to displace already existing gods and goddesses in order to facilitate the assimilation and exchange of new deities into the already existing order. During the first few centuries of Christian development, martyrs and other figures provided replacements for some other deities. Later on, as the Christian religion advanced and gained official recognition, ascetics more often than martyrs replaced former deities. For this reason, in a new religion based on God and his son, Mary provided a powerful female figure that could surpass the pagan goddesses. According to Manuel Trens, who explains the Romanesque image of Mary enthroned, by the fifth century, she had been elevated to "Mother of God," and she was often represented with a crown, sitting in heaven by Jesus, her son (397-413). The enthusiasm for the image of Mary grew and in the sixteenth century her iconography was used as a

model of behavior for many women. Writers such as Juan Luis Vives urged women to emulate her chastity, industry, silence, compassion, and obedience. Virgin Mary also represented the antithesis of the earthly, carnal, and sinner Eve. "As an idealization of female purity, Mary denied the sexuality of woman and promoted the belief that is was dangerous and sinful" (Perry 41). Therefore, religion became an instrument with which men and women could explain their lives and judge their neighbors. Regardless of age and social stratus, every woman had to conform to gender social expectations as a "good woman," or fall into the nonconformity as a "bad/wicked woman." However, according to the patriarchal social order, very few women could attain such perfection because all women were somewhat deviant and they needed to work hard in order to obtain the standard female perfection portrayed by the Virgin Mary and the martyrs. Usually, religious women and married women were the ones who needed to mirror themselves in the image of Mary; they needed to carry on her purity, dedication, submission, and, in some cases, chastity, in order to conform to the gender definition and preserve the patriarchal social order.

Some women were more deviant than others. Prostitutes and courtesans were considered a betrayal of the good woman and the ultimate female depravity. For this reason, they needed to be regulated and restricted under a patriarchal system of laws and regulations. Unregulated prostitution could subvert the social order by appropriating the public space of the streets, while legalized prostitution safely contained women in brothels and "symbolically transformed their commerce into a version of the female self-sacrifice so exalted in the martyr-saints" (Perry 44).

According to Mary Elizabeth Perry, the patriarchal socio-political system legalized prostitution in order to preserve a gender order of arranged marriages, with males marrying later than females, and a sexual norm that placed great value on female chastity.

> This form of prostitution [controlled prostitution] assumed that society requires females to be available to serve males, with prostitutes as a special class of women to provide sexual services for young unmarried men, sailors, and merchants. (46)

As the clergymen Francisco Farfan stated, by paraphrasing Augustine's statement, prostitutes were seen as necessary vessels to collect the filth of the flesh; they were a necessary evil to prevent the worse sins of homosexuality, incest, rape, and seductions of honorable women.

> The brothel in the city, then, is like the stable, or latrine for the house. Because just as the city keeps itself clean by providing a separate place where filth and dung are gathered… neither less or more, assuming the dissolution of the flesh, acts the brothel: where the filth and ugliness of the flesh are gathered like the garbage and dung of the city. (860, 730)

Besides the "good women" who worked to reach perfection and the "wicked women" who satisfied male pleasures, there was another religious female symbol, Mary Magdalene, as a demonstration that promiscuous women could also be saved from their

sin and become examples of God's mercy.[15] Mary Magdalene was a repented prostitute who was saved by Jesus as he recognized her holiness in front of many who wanted to stone her to death. Her figure became especially important in the effort to convert prostitutes. "On her feast day, preachers went to the brothel to preach, or they marched prostitutes to churches where they urged them to convert in rituals of sermons and prayers" (Perry 50). After the Counter Reformation both in Europe and also in the New World, the patriarchal socio-political structure used religion and its symbols to regulate women's roles and sexual freedom. Therefore women of all kinds were trapped in a system of gender regulations, which subjugated their bodies to male supervision and control. Religious and married women needed to follow Virgin Mary's example and seek perfection, while prostitutes and courtesans had to embrace the filth of the world and satisfy male desires, with the exception of few who could repent like Mary Magdalene and be forgiven.

b. Objects of Exchange and Confinement

As I explained in the Introduction, women and their bodies were controlled in the phallocentric patriarchal social structure by a system of rules that customized them in specific places and roles (the house, the convent, and the brothel or patrician palaces). I look at patriarchy as a "coin"[16] that regulated female sexuality through time and space by confining women's bodies into a phallocentric scheme of rules and regulations. As Mary

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[15] Another female symbol representing the repenting sinner was Mary of Egypt. She was believed to have been a Christian woman who sold her body to sailors in order to pay her way to the Holy Land, where she wanted to worship the True Cross. There she was turned away from the Shrine as a sinner, but God recognized her holiness and directed her to a desert in which he sustained her for many years (Perry 50).

[16] I am using the image of the coin to describe Patriarchy, not in the sense of currency, but as a physical object with two different faces.

Daly explains in her book *Gyn/ecology*, patriarchy and its phallocentric structure had colonized humanity:

> Patriarchy appears to be "everywhere." Even outer space and the future have been colonized. As a rule, even the more imaginative science-fiction writers (allegedly the most foretelling futurists) cannot/will not create a space and time in which women get far beyond the role of space stewardess. Nor does this colonization exist simply "outside" women's minds, securely fastened into institutions we can physically leave behind. (1)

Married women and maidens who had a secured family dowry were in the *normalized*[17] category, given that women were supposed to find protection in a man, who was not their father, when they reached a certain age. Women were supposed to become one, find their wholeness, when united with their husbands, their male part. Therefore, young women passed from their fathers to their husbands as objects of exchange. Both Gayle Rubin in her "Traffic in Women" and Luce Irigaray in "Women on The Market" argue that Western patriarchy works by treating women as the currency by which men create a web of relations among themselves. They both use Marx to arrive at the conclusion that women were treated as fetish commodities with which patriarchal social relations were

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[17] The female "normative body" (*cuerpo normativo*) and the "normative woman" are important topics that were discussed by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in their book *Transgression*, in which they center their discussion on the normative body versus the grotesque body and the idea of the carnival as a transgression of the lower classes. On the other hand, Yolanda Gamboa will retake Stallybrass and White's theory and develop a discussion in the Spanish context on the "open" or "closed" body of a woman in her book *Cartografía social en la narrativa de María de Zayas*. The "normative woman" (*la mujer normativa*) was a closed woman, confined and unable to speak on her own, while the deviant woman, the prostitute, presented an open body able to turn her into a grotesque figure hard to control.

performed and understood. Women were the fundamental currency in the gender-relation scheme dictated by the phallocentric force for a successful patriarchal society.

> If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. The exchange of women does not necessarily imply that women are objectified, in the modern sense, since objects in the primitive world are imbued with highly personal qualities. But it does imply a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges-social organization. (Rubin 174)

Therefore, for the phallocentric patriarchal society to work smoothly women were reduced into objects of exchange ("in the modern sense") and restrained into a place of confinement represented by the house (for the normalized women), the convent and the brothel (for the marginalized women, the ones who could not "afford" to be exchanged in marriage agreements). The confinement worked as a form of protection and also of punishment. As Mary Elizabeth Perry states:

> Protection and punishment, in fact mingled in some confusion in pronouncement about unenclosed women. Prostitutes who observed

> regulations would be protected, but those who did not forfeited all social protection. In a similar fashion, women unrestrained by enclosure in the home, the brothel, or the convent deserved not only what violence they received at the hands of men, but also special punitive measures. "Neither wandering woman nor broken sword," warned a proverb of the period, emphasizing the link between enclosed women and subverted authority. (129)

Therefore, women of every class status and role were enclosed in a strict set of regulations with the excuse of protection. Moreover, it seemed like that the real protection was not directed to the "gentle sex," but, rather, it was meant to protect the male patriarchal social order. Women without rules were considered a threat to men and to their phallocentric gender-based structure. For this reason, when a woman could not be exchanged in marriage, she needed to be placed in another controlled environment like the brothel (and sometimes patrician houses) or the convent. Recognizing that many prostitutes (and eventually religious women) were not happy in their "confinement" and decided to leave the brothel (or convent), male officials of the Counter Reformation decided that women who left the brothel or convent "had to be placed in another form of enclosure" (Cruz & Perry 131). Marriage was preferable for prostitutes, "and Jesuits in particular established shelters not as convent for converting prostitutes, but as places to reeducate them for a 'regular position in the world,' as Ignatius of Loyola wrote, 'above all for a proper marriage.'" (Cruz, Perry 131). No woman could be left wondering in the

world without a set of rules and structures that would limit her social and sexual activity.[18]

Veronica Franco, in Sixteenth Century Venice, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in Seventeenth Century Mexico, found themselves in a space of confinement (or, better said, chose to be in this specific space of confinement rather than marriage) in which they also found their freedom. Both women became a threat to the phallocentric patriarchal order from within, from the four walls of their confinement.

In the book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault explores the history of the modern penal system by analyzing forms of punishment in their social contexts. According to Foucault's argument, hierarchy, discipline (timetables, military drills, exercises etc.), and the *Panopticon* ("The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly" [173]) are fundamental in controlling people (women) and their bodies.

> The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible

[18] As Ann J. Cruz and Elizabeth Perry explain in their book *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain*, "Magdalene houses could provide an alternative to marriage for converting prostitutes" (132). Both in Counter Reformation Europe and in the New Spain the city government voted to contribute with money to build houses (for example, the house of Penitents or the house of *Las Recogidas*) for repented prostitutes and for women that did not represent a perfect fit for brothels or convents. "One historian has suggested that other women, such as widows and poor women, also found within these houses asylum and protection for varying periods of time" (133). Some of these houses also became convents in which former prostitutes could have entered a religious order. These houses were characterized by a very severe discipline: "former prostitutes were usually expected to follow a regimen of work and prayer that would correct their former sinfulness" (133). Moreover, in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century in many parts of the Old World, some "incorrigible" women were sent to prison in which they were forced to follow programs of work and correction (Pérez Baltasar 26-28). The patriarchal social structure did not allow "lost" or vagabond women around the cities; they needed to be confined under the supervision of a male eye.

> to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible. (170)

Both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in a different time and space, were inscribed in this kind of *panopticon* system, constantly controlled, and subjected to its phallocentric patriarchal discipline and rules. However, both women were able to challenge this omniscient patriarchal controlling eye by finding in their confinement a space of intellectual freedom and a space in which imposed gender roles were blurred. Through the white space of their pages, they were able to emerge as that element of resistance of which Foucault talks about when describing the punishment and power system in a "prison-like network." The power and technique of punishment originated in brothel, patrician houses, and convents, derives from knowledge that creates/classifies individuals and control their bodies. However, Veronica Franco, under the "protection" of Domenico Venier, and Sor Juana, in the convent of Santa Paula, used their confined bodies to free their minds through the artifice of writing. With their compositions created in a space of *liminality*, both women challenged the patriarchal system of control by subverting the gender roles and, eventually, by destabilizing the gender identities of their interlocutors. According to Luz Ángela Martinez's critical article, the Spanish colonies in the New World were also a representation of the "controlled society" or the "enclosed society" that Foucault talks about in *Discipline and Punish*:

> Nuestra Colonia en su conjunto es un excelente ejemplo de sociedad vigilada (Foucault 1979) o sociedad cerrada, así como sus desarrollos culturales son modélicos de los vínculos entre las formas del poder, la

> estética y los distintos mecanismos de enmascaramiento y simulación-disimulación que operan en los discursos. (70)
>
> Our Colony, as a whole, is an excellent example of a controlled society (Foucault 1979) or enclosed society, and its cultural development works as a model for the links between types of power, aesthetics, and the different methods of masking and of simulation-dissimulation, which operate in the different discourses. (My translation)

Therefore, the patriarchal system of rules in which Veronica Franco and Sor Juana were trapped (or chose to be trapped), could only control their bodies (constricting them in a specific dress-code and repetitive routines), but it was not able to control their humanist soul, a "clothes-less" soul that could freely exist within the confinement of the four walls by molding the black ink into a perfect tool of subjectivity and agency.

PROTO-FEMINISM AND THE FIRST FEMALE VOICES

Throughout the centuries, women took different routes to self-defense and self-authorization; a process that developed through confrontation with the Bible. This sacred text (mostly the Genesis, the Fall, and Saint Paul), example of the Classic and Judeo-Christian tradition, was used for centuries by patriarchal authorities to justify women's subordination. Biblical authority also stated that women could not think, teach, or speak in public. For this reason, some women started to develop a feminist Bible criticism that seemed to be an appropriate response to the constraints and limitations imposed on women by religious and biblical gender definitions and assumptions. Many women engaged in theological reinterpretation of the sacred text –because of its significance as well as availability to them – in order to re-define themselves and look for their equality

to men. Such an act could be considered as a first example of subversion and transformation of patriarchal doctrine towards a [proto]feminist liberation.

The first female reinterpretation of the Biblical story of Creation appears in the life and work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Hildegard was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, Christian mystic, and philosopher who was recently named *Doctor of the Church* by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. She regarded Eve as a prefiguration of the image of Mary, the symbol of Divine humanity, "in which the whole human race lay hidden until it should come forth in God's mighty power, just as he had brought forth the first man. Male and female were joined together, therefore in such a way that each one works through the other" (Newman 96). Hildegard saw men and women complementary and interdependent, yet she thought that women were physically weaker than men because they were created from flesh; however both man and woman needed each other to fulfill their hope with the creation of new life. Before the Fall, Hildegard envisioned Adam and Eve living in a state of perfection, "a wholeness of mind and body in which sex was free of lust and in which Eve would have given birth to a child painlessly from her side, the way she was created out of Adam" (Lerner 143).

A couple of centuries later, in the fourteenth century, Christine de Pizan (1365-c. 1430) is the second woman who writes a biblical re-interpretation, thus with a quite different style and context from that of the visionary Saint Hildegard. Christine was born in Venice but was taken to Paris by her father when he was called to assume the position of court astrologer for King Charles V. She obtained an excellent education through her father and at the age of fifteen she married an important notary, Etienne de Castel. Moreover, her husband encouraged her to continue with her literary activity until he died

in 1389, not long after her father's death. At the age of twenty-five, Christine was a widow, impoverished, and forced to support herself, and others, as a writer. Soon she was recognized as a writer and poet and she received a commission to write the biography of Charles V. She became a defender of women with her attack against the popular *Roman de la rose* by Jean de Meung and Guillaume de Loris. Her defense of the *Roman*'s mockery of women led to an exchange of letters with some leading male humanists of that time. With the letter exchange, she started a debate on the situation of women called the *querelle de femmes*, which lasted three centuries. Christine's Bible commentary is full of confidence and she elevates the figure of God as well as the image of man, the "noble substance," from which woman was created. According to Christine men should not criticize and stigmatize women, because they were created in the image of God:

> There Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at his feet like a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flash… I don't know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel that bears such a noble imprint? … God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble, in the feminine and masculine bodies… [W]oman was made by the Supreme Craftsman. In what place was she created? Was it vile matter? No, it was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was from the body of man from which God made woman. (23-24)

Christine, thus self-taught, was very familiar with classical literature. Here, she seems to be interpreting Saint Augustine's remark that woman was not created in God's image but in his "likeness" and used his statement that God created the soul not the body, which allowed her to stress on the equality of sexes regardless of their bodily differences. She also challenged the patriarchal ideas, as well as Hildegard's, in which Eve was inferior because she was created from flesh, and subverted them by drawing a complete different conclusion: if man was noble by his earlier creation, Eve (woman) surpassed him by being created of nobler substance, the "noblest substance." Christine also challenged the story of the Fall caused by the hands of Eve:

> And if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gain more through Mary than he lost through Eve when humanity was conjoined to the God head, which would never have taken place if Eve's misdeed had not occurred. Thus man and woman should be glad for this sin, though which such a honor has come about. For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this same creature. (*The City of Ladies* 24)

In this passage, Christine elevates even higher Mary's grace and her gift to humanity in order to diminish the sin of Eve. With *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine responded and slowly demolished all the major and minor charges constructed against women. She achieved so by raising all the misogynistic charges against women in a dialogue with the allegorical figure of Lady Reason, who answered with arguments and

examples from history, myths, fables, and excerpts from the Bible.[19] It was Christine de Pizan who first celebrated women's participation in the *querelle des femmes* about women's status in society.

Coming from a tradition which focused on the intellectual and physical inferiority of women, fourteenth-century learned men debated whether women were human, if they were good for men, what their nature was like, and if they could be educated. Men started taking all positions in this debate, from confirming women's inferiority, to asserting women's equality or even superiority. It was not until the early fifteenth century that, following Christine de Pizan, women started debating in favor of their own sex. Christine stated that "it is wrong to say that the majority of women are not good" (*City of Ladies* 185) and that she could tell of "countless ladies of different social backgrounds, maidens, married women, and widows, in whom God manifested His virtues with amazing force and constancy" (*City of Ladies* 253-54). In her *Le livre de la cité de dames* (*The Book of The City of Ladies*), written in 1405, she took on every traditional charge against women, mostly from de Loris and de Meun's *Roman de la rose*, and refuted or ridiculed them by speaking through the voices of the allegorical figures "Reason, Rectitude, and Justice." Finally, she presented a positive picture of marriage in which women were positive figures who brought joy to men. Also, she cited various examples of great women, starting with Eve, the "companion" of Adam, and continuing with her contemporaries,

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[19] In *The City of Ladies*, Lady Reason with her arguments tries to reverse the existing patriarchal order of gender. For example, when Christine explained how men have burdened her with "a heavy charge" by using the Latin proverb "God made women speak, weep, and sew," Lady Reason answered that the proverb is true and showed how these qualities have saved women through the years: "What special favors had God bestowed on women because of their tears! He did not despise the tears of Mary Magdalen, but accepted them and forgave her sins and through the merits of those tears she is in glory of Heaven" (*The City of Ladies* 29-30). After this, Lady Reason proceeded with some examples of female saints and also about the fact that Jesus' Resurrection was first reported by a woman.

like Mary of Berry, wife of John the Duke of Bourbon. In a later treatise, *Le livre de la mutation de fortune* (*The Mutation of Fortune*), written between 1400 and 1403, Christine praised other female qualities, among them, the "jewels" that her mother donated to her, namely, discretion and consideration, which formed the basis of her ability to educate herself. Christine de Pizan initiated a new line of argument that will be followed by other educated women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[20] She argued that men posed false images of women out of jealousy, rage, and moral and physical impotence. One of Christine de Pizan's arguments regarding misogyny was that it was increasing and spreading rapidly all over Europe with the advent of printing, since with the printing process, men could disseminate their negative ideas about women as they never could before, pamphlets, treatises, broadsides, and engravings spread denigrating and erroneous images of women and their bodies.

Christine's voice was one of the first ones that will be heard and followed through the centuries by other educated women who did not accept male expectations and stood up for their rights and the rights of other women. The *querelle des femmes* and the debate on women will continue for three centuries in various parts of Europe and England and will develop a bitter exchange between "feminists" and "anti-feminists" of both sexes. However, during the Medieval ages and the Renaissance the center of the debate was

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[20] Later women went further in their criticism of men, accusing them and condemning their nature. Among others, the Spanish writer Maria de Zayas (1590-1661) raged against men by naming the many women (martyrs, virgins, widowed and chaste) who had suffered and died by the cruelty of men. The Venetian Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652), forced into a convent by her father, wrote a pamphlet (*Paternal Tyranny*) condemning men as pimps and procurers who only abused their daughters. The sixteenth-century Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653), a Venetian writer, attacked man in her treatise *The Nobility and Excellence of Women together with the Defects and Deficiencies of Men* in response to a previous treatise written by a man called *The Defects of Women*. She listed many unpleasant male qualities (avarice, envy, pride, cruelty, ambition, tyranny etc.) as others did with women before.

mostly characterized by the reinterpretation of the Bible and the image of woman. The literal and moral exchange was, for over two centuries, an abstract, intellectual, and rhetorical debate.

One place where the *querelle* was particularly fruitful was in Italy because it was the origin of humanism, which encouraged the love of the arts. Men and women in Italy participated together in this love for literature, art, and writing and believed in the importance of the humanist mind regardless of whether it was located in a male or a female body. For this reason, many fathers in Italy tended to instruct not only their sons, but also their daughters in the light of humanism. One of the learned women of the Italian Renaissance, Isotta Nogarola (1418-66) took the Bible re-interpretation seriously and engaged in a long dialogue in letters about Adam and Eve's responsibility for the Fall with an important male humanist of her time, the Venetian Ludovico Foscarini. Naturally, Ludovico argued that Eve was guiltier because she received the greater punishment by causing Adam to sin and by listening to her own pride (King, Rabil 57-68). Obviously, Isotta disagreed with Ludovico's view of Eve and counter-parted, yet she insisted on Eve's weakness like Hildegard did before her (even though, probably, Isotta was not aware of Hildegard's biblical commentary.

> Where there is less intellect and less constancy, there is less sin; and Eve [lacked sense and constancy] and therefore sinned less. Knowing [her weakness] that crafty serpent began by tempting the woman, thinking the man perhaps invulnerable because of his constancy… And if Adam had not eaten, her sin would have no consequences… Notice that Adam's punishment appears harsher than Eve's; for God said to Adam: "to dust

> you shall return," and not to Eve, and death is the most terrible punishment that could be assigned. Therefore it is established that Adam's punishment was greater than Eve's… It is clearly less a sin to desire the knowledge of good and evil than to transgress against a divine commandment, since the desire for knowledge is a natural thing and all men by nature desire to know… Eve, weak and ignorant by nature, sinned much less by assenting to that astute serpent, who was called "wise," than Adam –created by God with perfect knowledge and understanding – in listening to the persuasion words and voice of the imperfect woman. (King, Rabil 59-60, 64, 66)

Isotta's argument seems to be against Eve, but it is ingenious and well prepared. She cites the Church Fathers and various Christian texts to support her answer. She uses Eve's weakness to take her out of the spotlight in which patriarchy placed her in order to stigmatize her with the Original Sin and the Fall from the Garden of Eden, and with her, all women. Moreover, Isotta defended Eve from the charge of pride by stating that the desire for knowledge is common to all men, and by saying "men," she meant all men and women.

Almost a generation later, Laura Cereta (1469-99), another Italian humanist and familiar with Isotta Nogarola's work, defended herself from male humanists who attacked her by using Isotta's way of reasoning and presenting Eve. The attackers were convinced that her father wrote her letters because they stated that a woman could not have done so. Cereta answered by bringing Eve into her argument:

> Therefore Augustine… I wish you would pay no attention to my age or at least my sex. For [woman's] nature is not immune to sin; nature produced our mother [Eve], not from earth or rock, but from Adam's humanity… We are quite an imperfect animal, and our puny strength is not sufficient for mighty battles. [But] you great men, wielding such authority, commanding such success… be careful… For where there is greater wisdom, there lies greater guilt. (King, Rabil 80)

Laura Cereta picked up on Nogarola's argument in support of Eve affirming that her weakness and her lack of knowledge deprived her from committing a sin unlike Adam who had the knowledge and therefore meant to commit a sinful act.

The Italian reinterpretation of the Bible and the defense of women (*querelle de femmes*), continued through what was then Europe, at that time of Marguerite d'Angoulême (1492-1549), Queen of Navarre and sister of King Francis I. She was familiar with the writings of mystics like Hildegard of Bingen and Mechthild of Hackeborn, who inspired her to begin a religion and spiritual mission. Marguerite of Navarre in her book, *Mirror of Sinful Soul* (1531), not only chose a female narrator, but by echoing the mystical ecstasy of her female predecessors she stressed that God bestowed on her as a woman His special blessing:

> You call me friend, bride, and beautiful:
>
> If I am, you have made me so…
>
> As I listen to you I hear myself called Mother
>
> Sister, Daughter, Bride. Ah, the soul that can

Feel this sweetness is all but consumed,

Melted, burned, reduced to nothing. (Lerner 148)

Forty years later, a new pamphlet debate based on women started in England, following the Italian and French *querelle de femmes*. In all three countries, the debate started because of the publication of an anti-feminist pamphlet. In England, one of the first pamphleteers was Jane Anger who responded to a previous misogynist pamphlet with a woman-centered defense. Anger's defense of Eve was based on the female act of creation, which represented Eve's superiority compared to Adam. God gave Eve the blessing of procreation after the Fall, a gift that started with the hands of God and that was given to Eve and not to Adam.[21] To defend her argument, Anger also used many examples of other virtuous women from Antiquity and from the Bible, as others did before her (like Christine de Pizan) and will continue doing after her.

Feminist Bible reinterpretation and criticism appeared to come from individual women who gave an alternative re-interpretation to previous patriarchal interpretations. According to Gerda Lerner, female criticism followed similar patterns:

> they usually juxtaposed contradictory statements from the biblical texts (such as the two versions of Genesis); they used texts from other parts of the Bible to interpret the core texts differently (such as the Song of

[21] "The creation of man and woman at the first, he being formed In principio of dross and filthy clay, did so remain until God saw that in him his workmanship was good, and therefore by the transformation of the dust which was loathsome unto flesh it became purified. Then lacking a help for him, God, making woman of man's flesh that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show how far women are more excellent than men. Our bodies are fruitful, whereby the world increaseth, and our care wonderful by which man is preserved. From woman sprang man's salvation. A woman was the first that believed, and a woman likewise the first that repented of sin" (Lerner 151).

> Deborah to contradict St. Paul); they cited different patristic authorities over the dominant ones. (159)

Some women freely re-interpreted the sacred text using only their own insight as authority; others researched and selected patriarchal male authors to start from and created their own arguments. The weight of patriarchal thought denied women the right to knowledge, therefore each woman had to invent and re-invent their argument, generation after generation. In any case, since women were denied authority and even humanity over the years, they argued not only for their right to knowledge, but for their own salvation. Veronica Franco (1546-91) and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-95) are two exemplary women who felt the heaviness of their female body, and who searched deeply into their *personae* in order to find a strategic literary way to surpass the obstacles of patriarchy, embody their essence, and "write" themselves to freedom.

EMBODYING MARGINALITY: VERONICA FRANCO AND SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

As stated before, women's consciousness developed over two centuries. Several female writers tried to come out of their silence and give a voice to their *personae* by adapting to gender constraints, deconstructing them, or, sometimes, openly attacking them. According to Gerda Lerner, by accepting their talent "as a gift of an almost mysterious nature enabled such women to disregard patriarchal constrains, gender-defined roles and the constant barrage of discouragement every intellectual active woman faced," and empowered them (167). Throughout the centuries there appeared women of extraordinary talent who, despite all obstacles, acquired an education and created intellectual work of great quality. This is exemplified in the life and work of two women:

Veronica Franco, a Venetian courtesan of the late Italian Renaissance, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Mexican nun of the Baroque of the Indies. These two women, separated from an ocean and a century apart, were able to use their pen and paper to challenge and eventually reverse the patriarchal socio-political order, escaping their marginal and confined position, and emerging in their own defense and in the defense of women.[22]

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, women were associated with Eve's sin and therefore cursed not only in the Christian religion, but also in the popular culture and oral traditions. For this reason, they started to analyze and argue against misogynistic texts of the classical and early Christian tradition (Hildegard of Bingen, Isotta Nogarola etc.). These proto-feminist women started a defense of Eve and her innocence in order to redeem her and all women from the original sin. Also, in the early fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan initiated what will be later called *la querelle de femmes*, a literary and philosophical movement that focused on the value of women and that continued until the eighteenth century. Parallel to the *querelle*, the phallocentric patriarchal society slowly reduced women into objects of exchange and confined them in secured places (the house for married women and the convent or brothel for the other women, the marginalized ones). Women were enclosed not only as a form of protection, but also to control their bodies and sexuality. Women (just like female Nature) have been historically and socially exploited by patriarchy and, consequently, women's bodies have been subjected to a system of socio-political and economic restrictions that enclosed them in convents,

[22] My comparison and association between Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are not the only valid ones, since there have been other studies. For example Stephanie Merrim compares early-modern women writers (like María de Zayas) to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in her book *Early Modern Women Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (1999).

homes, or brothels, and obligated them to find a different way to resist and eventually escape their "chained" condition.

LIMINALITY AND THE DESTABILIZATION OF GENDER ROLES

During the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, both in the Old and the New World (as I mentioned earlier in this chapter), the patriarchal social structure created a set of fixed gender rules based on gender roles to control, female sexuality and its consequent social freedom which was considered a threat to male superiority. Women who had enough family money to receive a good dowry felt into the category of the *normalized* woman: a woman turned into an object of exchange between men (from father to husband) to create male bonds and, therefore, construct a patriarchal social order, as Gail Rubin explained. In the patriarchal system of gender roles, there were also women who could not fall into the *normalized* category because they did not have enough means to receive a dowry, their family was not a good family to create bonds with, or some women were simply not made for marriage. These women were pushed to the margins of society, confined in convents, brothels/patrician houses, or the streets to destabilize their *personae* and reinforce their inferiority and, sometimes, inexistence. In these marginalized positions, women managed to create small matriarchal sub-societies at the margins of a patriarchal order.

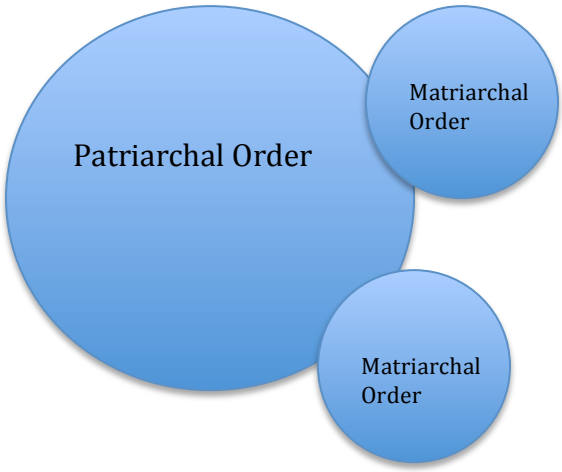


Figure 1 ***The Creation of Matriarchal Sub-Societies***

Convents and brothels were regulated by women who created a new set of rules that allowed them to survive in a matriarchal environment at the margins of a bigger patriarchal social order. Both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz lived in their respective matriarchal institutions while creating a "liminal" space, a space of freedom in which their gender role was blurred and their female *personae* could acquire more power. The term "liminality" comes from the Latin *limen,* which means "threshold" (Chakraborty 145). A "liminal" space is the in-between location for cultural negotiation and meaning development. In his discourse on colonization, Homi K. Bhabha stresses the importance of border locations, threshold environments in which cultural meaning is created. He refers to "third space" or l*iminality* as a transitory, in between-space characterized by indeterminacy, hybridity, ambiguity, and eventually a potential space for

subversion and change. “This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). Bhabha considers hybridity in the context of colonialism in which colonial governing authorities adopt it to translate the identity of the colonized (the Other) and frame him/her within a singular framework. This new hybrid identity emerges from the interweaving of elements between both the colonizer and the colonized and “challenges the authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity” (Chakraborty 149). Moreover, Bhabha talks about the “third space” in relation to the concept of hybridity. According to him, this “third space” emerges out of tensions between two different cultures and it becomes the space for translations and dialogues, which raise questions about identity and culture. This “third space” or *liminality* creates new possibilities and meanings to the new identity. “This newer opening not only questions the established notions of culture and identity but also provides new forms of cultural meaning; and thereby it significantly suspends the limits of the boundaries” (Chakraborty 149). Therefore, Bhabha’s “third space” is a space for opportunities and growth of new ideas that reject anything fixed. The “third space” opens up new strengths of thought that allow breaking from the rigidity of colonial binary thinking. Therefore, I will argue that the “third space” or liminal space between a patriarchal social order and a matriarchal one, in which Veronica Franco and Sor Juana found themselves thinking and writing, allowed them to go beyond the rigidity of gender binaries and explore different venues of freedom.

In this liminal space both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana stopped “performing” the fixed gender roles imposed by the patriarchal social order and created new female

creatures at the margins of patriarchal society who were able, through their writing, to destabilize the gender identities of the male interlocutors who got in contact with them. According to Judith Butler, the body is not a "being", but a variable boundary, "a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field or gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality…" (177). Butler agrees with Simone de Beauvoir that gender is constructed and determined by society; however, she brings de Beauvoir's discourse to another level when she states that gender is an act and that gender roles become sedimented into society with the act of performance.

> As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization. (178)

For this reason, I argue that both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in their liminal space created within their confinements (the patrician house and the convent, respectively), stopped performing the patriarchal gender roles imposed by society and created a new in-between gender which allowed them to write, resist, and eventually escape the supposed disability of their female gendered bodies.

Eli Clare, in his book *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, talks about his physical disability and how modern society has been stigmatizing him with, not only socially constructed limitations, but also physical ones. Eli Clare is a white, disabled (with CP) and gender-queer writer, poet, and social activist who explains the distorted view that we have of people marginalized from society, and how differently these people perceive themselves. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,

following Clare's argument, could be seen as having stolen bodies and identities. Women in the past were considered "disabled" by the socio-economic patriarchal structure: they were different from men, not able to reach intellectual knowledge, and, therefore, inferior. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana did not perceive themselves as inferior, but rather as equal thinking subjects who had the same intellectual abilities as men. They did not accept being stigmatized and trapped in a socio-political bodily convention that did not belong to their inner selves. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana tried, in the liminal space of their page, to create a world outside of patriarchy, even though patriarchy appeared (and appears) to be everywhere. As Mary Daly states: "Even outer and the future has been colonized" (*Gyn/Ecology* 1). Nonetheless, both women, socially "disabled" by birth, their times, culture, and different male figures, were able to stand up and fight against these male-constructed stereotypes. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana understood that their bodies had been violently stolen and that, through their writings, it could be successfully reclaimed.

With the creation of this liminal "new-gender," Veronica Franco and Sor Juana subverted the outside patriarchal order that could conceive of a woman only through the binary gender roles (the Madonna or the Medusa/Eve –with the exception of Mary Magdalene who represented the wicked woman who could repent and take the salvation road). Therefore, when the outside patriarchal society came in contact with them it felt destabilized; it was not able to control this new "gender" that was growing in a space of *liminality*. Maffio Venier and the Bishop of Puebla respectively, felt destabilized in their patriarchal male roles and thus lost their authorial identities while interacting with Veronica Franco and Sor Juana in the space of *liminality*: Maffio Venier started

corresponding with Veronica Franco under the pseudonym of "Incerto autore" (unknown author), while Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz became "Sor Filotea de la Cruz" in order to interact with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

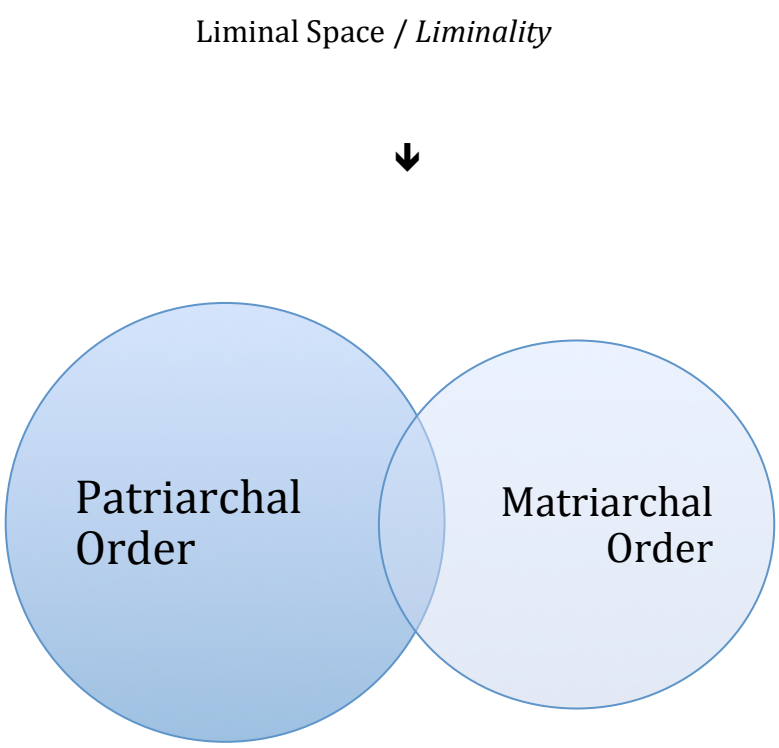


Figure 2 ***Liminality***

According to Hélène Cixous in her book *The Newly Born Woman*, women are "bisexual" beings, not "having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality" (352). Women are able to present in their being both genders (the masculine and the feminine) because in a woman both genders can coexist without the necessity of nulling each other – as it happens in a male being. "For historical reasons, at the present time it is woman who benefits from and opens up with this bisexuality beside itself, which does not annihilate differences but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more…" (Cixous 352).

For this reason, both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were able to neutralize gender lines, respectively by being a powerful "honored" courtesan and by wearing the monastic habit. Both women were able to create their very own liminal space in which they, not only did not perform the patriarchal gender roles, but also they fought, wrote, and pursue the light of knowledge.

In their respective space of *liminality*, both Veronica Franco and, almost a century later, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, found their female "room of one's own" in the confinement of the patriarchal house and the convent; a concept that Virgina Woolf will explain in the twentieth century in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929).[23] In this room/space they did not perform the female gender role assigned to them by the outside patriarchal order; they blurred the gender lines and through their writings they destabilized the male interlocutors and their gender identities. Moreover, while in their liminal space, both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana were able to create a web of connections, through time and space, with other women in different liminal spaces. Their confinements and, consequently, their liminal spaces, resulted in little timeless machines of giving and receiving of female wisdom and power. For example, going back to my discussion on the first female voices and how they started subverting the patriarchal social order with the defense of Eve in the Genesis, these women started connecting the

[23] At the beginning of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf was not concerned only about middle-class women (like Mary Wollstonecraft a century earlier), but also about working-class women of her time. According to Woolf, a woman needed five hundred pounds (£500) and a "room" (both monetary independence and privacy) in order to be able to have the same literary rights and advantages of men. A "room of one's own" would allow women to liberate their creativity while separating themselves from their daily routine: housework and children. "If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room. And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain, _ 'women never have an half hour… that they can call their own' _ she was always interrupted. Still it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play…" (66)

small pieces of a bigger female rebellion. They took words and ideas from each other, they gave and receive, in order to differently attack the patriarchal chains that confined them into specific gender roles: the mother, the religious woman (examples of the Virgin Mary), or the prostitute (the Eve/ Medusa). This female system of "giving and receiving" of words, ideas, and activism worked simultaneously, yet differed from the patriarchal male system of exchange in which women were used as object/currency in order to create or fortify relationships among men.[24] These women tried to subvert the patriarchal language by trying to create a different language; a female language written by women that could slowly change history and, eventually, the worldview on women.

Luce Irigaray in her book *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), challenges both Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis regarding the understanding of womanhood as well as their articulation of a female discourse. Irigaray seeks to dispute and displace patriarchal male-centered structures of language through a female writing practice aiming toward the creation of a woman's discourse, a discourse that, according to Irigaray, could end Western phallocentrism. She also asserts that society tends to construct a specific type of woman but, inside that woman, there is a female essence, which is fluid and therefore it can easily come out of any construct and confinement.

> If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Being the same old stories all over again… all around us, men and women sound just the same. The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and

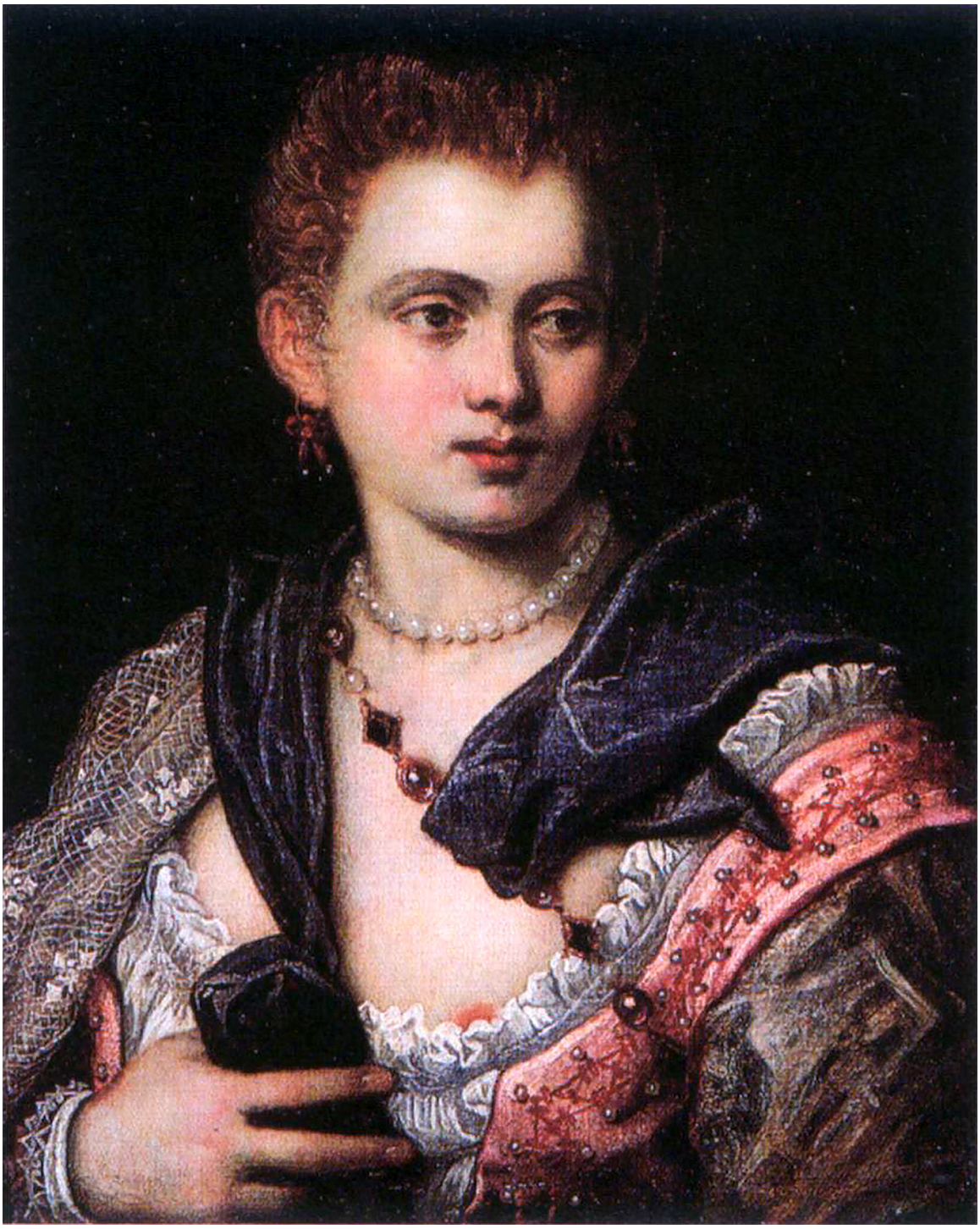
[24] See Gayle Rubin "The Traffic In Women: Notes On The Political Economy of Sex" in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna R. Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975:157-210.

> separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibilities of making connections. The same… Same… always the same… Come out of their language. Try to go back through the names they've given you. I'll wait for you… You stay here, and you wont be absorbed into familiar scenes, worn-out phrases, routine gestures. Into bodies already encoded within a system. Try to pay attention to yourself. To me. Without letting conversation, or habit, distract you. (205-6)

All these women, including Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, from their liminal spaces, shared the same history and ideas in order to create a different language that could subvert the patriarchal social order and liberate them from their encoded bodies and routines. For this reason, the liminal space represented a space of sisterhood[25] in which they share ideas, took and received, in order to challenge the phallocentric social order and slowly change the world.

> *Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock,*
>
> *no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.*
>
> – Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own* 75)

[25] I am not using the term "sisterhood" envisioned and evoked by modern feminists and liberationists. According to bell hooks in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, the term sisterhood was based on the idea of a common female oppression, which was false because women are different in nature and social reality. "Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices" (hooks 44). In my dissertation, the word "sisterhood" implies the fact that all women were conditioned and disadvantaged by their biological female body and they had to learn how to escape the confinement of their female condition in order to set free their mind and knowledge capacity –just like Veronica Franco did through her "body-weight" literary technique and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz through the androgyny conception of her religious body. For this reason, the "sisterhood" I am envisioning in my dissertation is a system of literary "giving and receiving" among women in different times and spaces that, little by little, changed the world and the patriarchal binary conception of women as Virgin Maries or Medusas.



Veronica Franco painted by Jacopo Tintoretto (Venice, 1518-94)

Girl in a Fur Coat by Titian (1535), Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna

CHAPTER TWO

The Pen as Sword: Veronica Franco and the Courtesan's Body

> *When we are too armed and trained, we can convince men that we have hands, feet, and a heart like yours; and although we may be delicate and soft, some men who are delicate are also strong; and others, coarse and harsh, are cowards. Women have not yet realized this, for if they should decide to do so, they would be able to fight you until death; and to prove that I speak the truth, amongst so many women, I will be the first to act, setting an example for them to follow.*
>
> – Veronica Franco

EARLY MODERN VENICE

When foreign travelers visited the Republic of Venice during the early modern period, they marveled at the large number of courtesans in the city. The Englishman Thomas Coryat[26] explained:

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[26] Thomas Coryat (1577-1617) was an English traveler and writer of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean age. He spent a long journey in Venice during his European trip and wrote about his discoveries. There are a lot of references in his work about Venetian courtesans: their costumes, manners, religious works, social life, and "sinful" practices.

> As for the number of these Venetian Cortezans it is very great. For it is thought there are of them in the whole City and other adiacent places, as Murano, Malomocco, &c. at the least twenty thousand, whereof many are esteemed so loose, that they are said to open their quivers to every arrow. (Maclehose 264)

With their diaries, early modern travelers contributed to an image of Venice as a city invaded with courtesans and prostitutes who seemed to represent one of the Republic's obligatory tourist attractions. "… so infinite are the allurements of these amorous Calypsos, that the fame of them hath drawen many to Venice from some of the remotes parts of Christendom, to contemplate their beauties, and enjoy their pleasant dalliances" (Maclehose 265). All of these social descriptions of Venice as a pleasure-seeking city helped develop a vision of Venice as a feminine figure. In the sixteenth century, all public forms of art –visual arts (painting, sculpture, and public buildings), music, ritual and pageantry, poetry –represented Venice as an inviolate and pure female born like a Venus Anadyomene from the sea on the day of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary (March 25th).[27] "The myth asserts that the city was divinely chosen as a Christian successor to ancient Rome for having successfully combined three forms of government (democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy) into one well-balanced state" (Rosenthal 13). Paolo Veronese's allegorical painting, *The Apotheosis of Venice*, painted in 1579 for the

[27] The association between the land and the female is not unusual at the time. As Stallybrass states: "When women were the objects to be mapped out, virginity and marital 'chastity' were pictured as fragile states to be maintained by the surveillance of wives and daughters. But paradoxically the normative 'Woman' could become the emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of integrity of the state. The stage, like the virgin, was a hortus conclusus, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies" (*Rewriting the Renaissance* 129). For example, Elizabeth I was portrayed standing upon a map of England as a symbol of power (the imperial virgin) and as the ruler of all England and Europe at that time.

Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Ducal Palace,[28] commemorates the Serenissima's divine origins by positioning a female virginal figure on an elevated throne surrounded by adoring citizens and victories. As a mixture of sacred and secular icons, this representation of Venice/Venus replaced the sacred role of the Virgin.

Venice is represented by the central female figure who is being crowned by the angel of Justice and who governs the scene. Venice, almost a virginal figure, is in a higher position and she is about to ascend to heaven, while, in the lower part of the painting, Veronese decided to represent the Rape of Europa and its heritage over our Western civilization. Therefore, not only in Veronese's painting, but also in the Renaissance and

[28] This is the room in which the Doge (highest official in the Republic of Venice) used to welcome foreign political figures.

Baroque Venetian imaginary, Venice occupies a position of power – over the rest of European descendants – by being represented as a Virgin-like figure. However, the power of the virginal female figure depicted by Veronese in his allegory of Venice clashed with the strict regimen by which most Sixteenth-century Venetian women of all classes had to live. Women did not possess any political power of their own and, due to an oligarchy dominated by men, they did not receive too much attention nor were there too many laws in their defense. "Upper-class married women's activities were carefully regulated by their husbands, and government officials, who feared political and social disturbance, repeatedly monitored courtesans' dress, expenditures, and public appearance, apparently not always with success" (Rosenthal 15). Therefore, Sixteenth-century women and their lives were hardly protected from social, political, and personal oppression. Also, contrary to the mythical representation of the irresponsible and strong courtesan from travelers' accounts, Venetian courtesans, whether belonging to the *cittadino* or the lower classes, did not choose prostitution over other professions, but were forced into it principally due to economic necessity.[29]

> In a society in which arranging a reputable marriage for a young woman had become increasingly, even prohibitively, expensive as a result of the inflation of dowries, not to mention politically problematic for the upper class, many Venetian girls were introduced to prostitution at a very young age by their aging mothers, who were in need of financial assistance.

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[29] The coat of arms in Veronica Franco's family consists of an orange field with a blue band in the upper portion decorated with three yellow stars. The lower portion of the shield has a green mountain with three peaks. This represents the privileges associated with *cittadini* and, by definition, of Venetian citizenship. (Brian Pullan. *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*. Cambridge: Harward UP, 1971).

> Veronica Franco herself was the daughter of an impoverished courtesan. (Rosenthal 15)

Sixteenth century Venice had become mythical to visitors and travelers for its flourishing economy and commerce, which supported publishing, as well as the representation of Venice as a female icon. The Republic of Venice was a very peculiar place different and distinct from any other cities in Italy at that time. It was the publishing capital of Italy whose government offered greater intellectual activity and freedom to Venice than to any other Italian state at that time. And it was there that Humanism flourished through the work of Bembo and helped expand the tradition. "Humanism started to become vernacular, as the Tuscan language gradually supplanted Latin and the frequency of translations made classical culture accessible" (Stortoni & Lillie XV).[30] For this reason, many women appeared in public with a smaller edition of Petrarca's *Rime* (under the name of *Il Petrarchino*) usually hanging from their waistline with an elegant ribbon. "They often had themselves portrayed with a book in their hands, either a book they were reading, or a book they wrote" (Stortoni & Lillie XV).

While the myth of Venice presented a strong and exposed female icon to Venetian citizens and travelers, women themselves were far from participating in Venetian public, social, and civic life. However, only when it served the Republic's civic needs, both aristocratic women and some *cortigiane oneste* (honored courtesans) were used as a symbol of Venice's liberty, justice, and political splendor. Aristocratic women were needed for their presence to accompany their husbands as a representation of power and

[30] Humanism was a literary and philosophical phenomenon that blossomed in the fifteenth century Italy, and came to enter all aspects of life: "its name derives from Latin 'homo,' meaning not man, but human being. Hence, it extends to women" (Stortoni & Lillie IX).

balance in Venetian marriages, while the honored courtesans were important for their highly educated conversations and contributions to the Serenissima's political setting. For the most part, courtesans were frequently victims of male's envy and found themselves in the middle of a competition with men for public attention and, in some cases, literary acclaim. Veronica Franco, one of Italy's best-known women poets is one of these women, aware of her reality as female, courtesan, and citizen of Venice.

WOMEN WRITING IN VENICE

During Renaissance Italy, women poets not only wrote in great number, but also aspired to publish their work. Rinaldina Russell asserts that: "between 1538, the year of Colonna's first publication, and the end of the century, no fewer than two hundred books were authored by women or were anthologies of men's work that included contributions by women" (xix).[31] Russell adds that the period of time between 1539 and 1560 was the most productive for women's literary work, with fifty-six editions of books authored by women.

Italian women humanists and poets, during this time, had a specific mission to achieve with their writings: they desired immortality and being renowned for their literary endeavors, but also wanted to create bonds or webs of sisterhood, as I explained in Chapter One, in which they share ideas though a female system of exchange (of giving and receiving words, ideas, and activism) in order to challenge and eventually subvert the

[31] Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547), marquise of Pescara, was a noblewoman and poet of the Italian Renaissance. She later developed an artistic friendship with Michelangelo Buonarroti, with whom she exchanged poetic verses. After her husband's death, she dedicated her life to her literary skills and her friendship with Michelangelo until she decided to enter a convent in which she ended her days in religious silence.

phallocentric social order. For example, Gaspara Stampa,[32] who was separated from her noble lover because of her class status, claimed that she was able to escape her lowly social situation with the power of her pen. Stampa, in her sonnets, often equated the word *pena* (sorrow) with *penna* (pen), to indicate that her sorrow was transformed into her immortal writing. Women poets felt a sense of sisterhood by taking other women writers as role models, or dedicating poems to each other. In the case of Lucia Bertani Dell'Oro, she dedicated poems to Veronica Gàmbara and Vittoria Colonna and, vice-versa, Veronica Gàmbara and Marguerite de Valois dedicated poems back to her (Vittoria Colonna).[33]

Most of the lyric poetry of the sixteenth century was characterized by a strong *Petrarchism* – the imitation of the forms, themes, and concepts of Petrarca's *Rime*. Petrarca's writings influenced Renaissance writers thanks to the work of Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), the one that recognized the Italian Vernacular as a language and the codifier of *Petrarchism*.[34] "Petrarchism is, therefore, a poetry of imitation and emulation, in which a poet's originality is determined by the manner in which he or she manages to develop poems within the given conventions" (Stortoni & Lillie XVII). For this reason, Veronica Gàmbara and Vittoria Colonna, the first two women to attain great literary

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[32] Gaspara Stampa (1523-1554) was considered one of the greatest female poets of the Italian Renaissance. She was also a musician and a singer. Her lyrical verses were so acclaimed that she was often compared to the Greek Sappho. Despite her premature death at the age of 31, Stampa produced more than 300 poems, most of which were posthumously published.

[33] Also, in the new continent of the New Spain, during the seventeenth century, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz used to exchange love poems with her protectors, two *Marquesas* of New Spain, by creating a web of sisterhood (view Chapter 3).

[34] Cardinal Bembo upheld the use of the Tuscan vernacular as the literary language from all regions of Italy. In his *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) he asserted that the Tuscan language of Petrarca needed to be used for poetry, and the Tuscan of Boccaccio for prose.

prominence in Italy, wrote primarily in the Petrarchan style. Later in the century, another great woman poet, Veronica Franco, "a lusty and outspoken Venetian courtesan" (Stortoni & Lillie XVIII), manipulated and subverted the Petrarchan verse to write in *terza rima* and in prose.

> … women took writing very seriously, starting in their poetry their intention of acquiring fame, distinction and immortality with their poetic endeavors… Many talented women in Renaissance Italy were neither from courts nor from the emergent middle class. In the literary tradition of the West, it is a phenomenon peculiar to the Italian Renaissance that many women who wrote poetry were courtesans. (Stortoni, Lillie XVIII).

COURTESAN LIFE IN VENICE

During sixteenth-century Venice, the blurring of social and class boundaries between courtesans and noblewomen was one of the biggest concerns of the government and its authorities. A civic document of that time, stated that, not only foreigners were unable to tell in the streets of Venice who was a courtesan or a noblewoman, but also Venetian citizens had confusion in distinguishing the "bone dale triste" (the good from the bad ones).

> Sono accresciute tanto in excessivo numero le meretrice in questa città nostra, quale posposta ogni erubescentia et vergogna publicamente vanno per le stradde e chiesie et altrove sì ber ornate et vestite che molte volte le nobili et cittadine nostre per non esser differente dal vestir delle dette, solo non solum dalli forastieri ma dalli habitanti non conosciute le bone dalle

> triste, con cattivo et malissimo exempio di quelle che per mezzo li stanno in stantia et che le vedono. (*Senato Terra. Reg. 32, fol*. 126)
>
> The prostitutes have increased excessively in this city of ours, and having put aside all modesty and shame, they go publicly on the streets, churches, and other places so well dressed and adorned that often our noblewomen and citizens are not very differently dressed, so that not only foreigners but also local people are unable to distinguish the good ones from the bad ones, thus presenting a bad and most spiteful example for those who cross their path and happen to see them. (My translation)

For this reason, the government of Venice tried to protect the honor of patrician noblewomen by regulating courtesans' dress and proposing restrictions on their circulation in the public sphere in order to reconstruct boundaries between social classes. However, the laws happened to be unsuccessful because many courtesans often transgressed the boundaries by being an "honored courtesan" rather than a "meretrice." The *cortigiane oneste* satisfied society's needs for "a refined yet sexualized version of the aristocratic woman" (Rosenthal 60). The *cortigiana onesta* projected a highly sophisticated public image that she used to move easily from the domestic space of the family into the public sphere of Venetian life by mimicking the grace and décor of noblewomen's costumes. They could not be visually distinguished from noblewomen of the upper class. In 1542, the Council of Ten proposed the election of three men, *provveditori*, who were to oversee and control the public and social decorum of the

Serenissima.[35] Later on, this council of Ten started controlling courtesans and *meretrici* (prostitutes)'s public appearance.

> Né possino le soprascripte cortesane over meretrice andar in chiesia alcuna el zorno della festa et solenità principal di quella, a ciò non siamo causa de mal exempio con motti atti parole et opere lascive a quelli over a quelle che vano a bonfine in ditte chiesie con vergogna de questa città et con dishonor et despregio delli luochi sacri et offesa della Maestà de Dio. Li altri giorni veramente andando le predicte in chiesia alcuna non possino star, ingenochiarsi over sentar sopra li banchi della detta chiesia ove si riducono le nobile et cittadine nostre de buona et honesta conditione, ma debbino star separate et lontane da quelle, essendo caute e non dare scandalo alle altre persone da bene. (Calza 34)
>
> The said courtesans or prostitutes may not enter a church on the day of its festivals or during its principal celebrations, so that they shall not in any way create a bad example for the men and women who attend the above-mentioned churches for good purposes, with their lascivious words and deeds to shame this city and bring dishonor and debasement to this holy place, and offend our God's Majesty. On other ordinary days the above mentioned shall not be allowed to stand in no church whatsoever, kneel, or sit on the benches in which our female citizens of noble and honest condition stand, but they must keep apart and distance from them, being careful not to give offence to decent people. (My translation)

[35] The Council of Ten, or simply called the Ten, was one of the most important governing bodies of the Republic of Venice from 1310 to 1797.

This way, Venetian authorities tried to prevent courtesans from dressing as sumptuously as the upper class women. Like courtesans, patrician women were also subjected to strict presentation and sumptuary laws, "in part because of a prevalent concern with the enormous expense of sumptuous clothing, which was seen to be wasteful, and in part because such dress challenged male authority" (Rosenthal 69). However, these sumptuary laws were directed mostly against the *meretrici*, many of whom had the financial means to buy or rent luxurious dresses and costumes. A new law came out in 1592 stating that no *meretrice* could wear silk clothes or wear any object made of gold, silver, precious stones, or even fake jewels:

> Le meretrici habitanti in questa città non possino vestir né in alcuna parte della persona portar oro, argento, et seda, eccetto che le scuffie, qual siano di seda pura. Non possin portar cadenelle, anelli con pietra o senza, né meno alle orecchie alcuna cosa, tal che in tutto et per tutto sia prohibito alle ditte meretrici l'oro, l'argento et seda et etiam l'uso delle zolie di qualunque sorte, sì in casa come fuori di casa, et anco fuori di questa nostra città. (Rosenthal 70)
>
> The prostitutes in this city are not allowed to wear gold, silver, or silk as part of their dress or any part of their body, exception being made for caps or pure silk. They are not allowed to wear chains, rings with or without gem stones, or any ornament in their ears, so that, in fact, they are under all circumstances forbidden the use of gold, silver, and silk, as well as that of jewels of any kind, genuine or false, inside and outside the house and even outside this city. (Rosenthal 70)

In sixteenth and seventeenth century Venice, it was very difficult to visually distinguish a courtesan from a noblewoman and the Serenissima's Republic tried in vain to create legal rules and qualifications to regulate women's public expenditure and decorum.

VERONICA FRANCO THE COURTESAN

Veronica Franco was born in Venice in 1546 as a *cittadina originaria (*original citizen)[36] and she is considered one of the most famous courtesans and poets of the Sixteenth century. During this time, the Republic of Venice exhibited two types of courtesans: the "cortigiana onesta" (the "honored" courtesan), an intellectual and politically involved prostitute, and the "cortigiana di lume," a low class prostitute who gave service in the area of "Ponte di Rialto." In her book Veronica Franco, *The Honest Courtesan*, Rosenthal includes that: "To succeed as a courtesan, a woman needed to be beautiful, sophisticated in her dress and manners, and an elegant, cultivated conversationalist. If she demonstrated her intellectual powers in writing and publishing poetry and prose, so much better" (Jones & Rosenthal 1). Stortoni and Lillie in their book *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, explain how:

> The low class courtesans, or di candela (of the candle, possibly because they received clients in the back of candle shops, or because they were used to illuminate the inns where they stayed), or della minor sorte (of the lower kind), were numerous, but did not have much education or refinement. (XIX).

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36 "This subpatriciate group constituted the salaried bureaucracy and professional order of Venice. Their names were recorded in the *Libro d'argento* (Silver book, while those of the nobility were registered in the *Libro d'oro* (Golden book). Denied governmental positions or a vote in the Great Council (The Maggior Consiglio), this hereditarily defined caste nevertheless occupied positions in the *scuole grandi*, the Venetian confraternities, and in the chancery" (Rosenthal 66).

An even more revered courtesans, the *cortigiane honorate* were of upper class and extremely educated. For this reason, both in the Republic of Venice and in other Italian Republics, many talented women of the Italian Renaissance practiced the profession of *cortegiana*,[37] as they received access to education and to a higher status in society.

Veronica Franco made her living by arranging and agreeing to sexual relations with the Venetian elite and other important travelers like merchants, ambassadors, and kings. The prostitution in this century was strongly regulated by rigid geographic laws, which mirrored Venice's fame as one of the most organized and articulated cities in the peninsula. In her book *The Honest Courtesan*, Margaret Rosenthal describes the city of Venice and the various categories within prostitution:

> The danger perceived in unrestrained female sexuality might be the catalyst behind the extreme regulations and geographic restrictions Venetian authorities imposed on prostitutes, making their profession 'the most legal and strictly controlled aspect of this culture.' Notwithstanding the existence of five or six categories of prostitutes, from the lowest to the educated and refined "cortigiane oneste." (23)

Veronica Franco was also referred to as one of the most influential "cortigiane oneste" both of her time and of the history of Venice. She was initiated and instructed to be a courtesan, in the Republic of the Serenissima, by her own mother, Paola Fracassa, who was practicing the same profession, but was too old to continue. For this reason, my argument is that women who were pushed to the margins by the ruling patriarchal society

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[37] The courtesan profession flourished in two major Italian centers: Venice and Rome. While the courtesans in Rome where famous for their beauty, accomplishments, and numbers, their status was precarious due to periodic expulsions by the popes. After being expelled, Roman courtesans often moved to Venice "where the tenor of life, with its wealth, masked balls and banquets, favored their trade" (Stortoni & Lillie XX).

–because they were considered a threat to male superiority – slowly managed to create little matriarchal sub-societies/orders with their own rules to survive in the position of marginality. Both Paola Fracassa and her daughter, Veronica Franco, were products of the creation of marginal matriarchal worlds. The patriarchal social structure had created a set of fixed gender rules to control female sexuality and the consequent female social freedom. Matriarchal sub-societies (brothels and convents) had helped women, like Veronica Franco, to survive the forced marginality by generating a set of rules created by women and for women that were generationally passed from mother to daughter or from an older woman to a younger one. According to Stortoni and Lillie, "Often trained by their mothers – who may have also been courtesans – for a brilliant 'career,' they received a classical and comprehensive education that rivaled the education of courtly women" (XIX). The name of Veronica Franco and the one of her mother appear together in the *Catalogue of All the Principal and most Honored Courtesans of Venice (1565),* which is "a list of the names, addresses, and fees of well-known prostitutes in the city" (Jones & Rosenthal 2). Veronica Franco was determined to pursue a literary education and continue it by affiliating herself with Domenico Venier's circle. Unfortunately, we do not have much information on Franco's early education. Since she was the only daughter in a family with three sons, perhaps she was able to take advantage of her brothers' home schooling and the help of their private tutor.[38] According to Paul F. Grendler, while young men could have learned reading and writing with the help of private tutors at home or in state-supported schools, noblewomen and *cittadine* were primarily schooled at home or in a convent.

[38] For example, the *cittadina* poet and writer Moderata Fonte (footnote n. 13), a contemporary of Franco, was sponsored by her father who was her personal sponsor and who undertook her literary education.

> Social status and wealth, more than anything else, determined whether or not a girl received an education. Probably all noble and wealthy commoner girls learned how to read and write. Middle-class girls had some opportunities to learn, and poor and working-class girls had few possibilities. Only a handful of girls of any class attended neighborhood independent schools. (101-2)

Later on, with the help of Venier, Veronica Franco founded a distinguished salon in which she also gave literary soirées. Franco was able to develop her literary talents and publicize her endeavors in a short period of time. Between the 1570's and 1580's many women started participating in literary milieus, although only a small percentage of them published their works. Veronica Franco was one of the exceptions among the courtesans of her time, but her writings, mostly her wills, reveal the precarious situation of a woman who lived outside of the marital status and religious conventions. As a courtesan she depended on her beauty (that did not last very long) and her capacity to self-promote and sustain herself and her beloved.

The view of Venice as a Republic, as previously described, was as idealized as the courtesan's profession: a city of social freedom and tolerance.

> The idealizing view of the courtesan's profession took hold not only in a period when Venice was intent on projecting throughout Italy and abroad a message of social freedom and tolerance but also in latter-day cultural and historical treatments of the subject. The honest courtesan, according to this perspective, not only embodied a city immersed in luxury, spectacle,

> disguise, commercialization, voluptuousness, and sensuality but also had a hand in bringing about the republic's subsequent decline. (Rosenthal 3)

Being Venice a Republic filled with courtesans as Thomas Coryat explained in his travel diaries, many male contemporaries and authors used these courtesans as a satirical outlet in their uneasy relationship with Venetian authority and patronage. In fact, Venetian male authors' satirical representations of the courtesan uncovered an envy and mistrust of the courtesan's claim to public estimation and her desire for literary acclaim. An example of this sort of tension can be seen in Veronica Franco's life and her relation with the Venier family. Her interaction in the Venier's academy with patrician intellectuals often generated spiteful and injurious attacks.

> As for thine eyes, shut them and turne them aside from these venereous Venetian objects. For they are double windows that conveigh them to thy heart. Also thou must fortifie thine eares against the attractive inchauntments of their plausible speeches… so doe thou only breath a few words upon them and presently be gone from them: for it thou dost linger with them thou wilt finde their poyson to be more pernicious than that of the scorpion, aspe, or cocatrice. (Maclehose 267)

The Venetian courtesans were both worthy of marvel and, more often, viewed as an object of moral reprehension in travelers' accounts –like the one we just read from *Coryat Crudities* – and in Venetian satirists' texts. Courtesans were often seen as the blame for the Serenissima's[39] lavish display of wealth and power throughout the sixteenth century. However, the sixteenth-century government of Venice tended to overlook female

[39] Another name for the Republic of Venice

prostitution when faced with other sexual crimes (for example adultery, fornication, and rape –which were considered more serious). The growing numbers of female prostitution were tied to the increasing Venetian mercantile activity due to a fluid urban and capitalist economy tied to an unusually liberal social policy. According to Guido Ruggiero:

> … by capitalizing on the sexuality of young women who did not have the economic status to fit into society thorough the normal dowry system… society created a secondary sexual economy that safely incorporated the sexuality of young women too poor to participate in the primary system. (153)

When discussing the situation of women in Seville, Spain, Mary Elizabeth Perry in her book *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville,* also addresses the economy and explains how women-prostitutes were "lost souls" trapped in a socio-political patriarchal environment, yet an integral part of the community, since it was the city fathers who needed the commerce of prostitution to reinforce and keep their authority.

> "Lost Women" were not lost at all in early modern Seville… More than lost they were used. Prostitution was commercially profitable for city fathers as well as street people. It reinforced the authority of the ruling class over unmarried women, folk-practitioners, sailors, youths, and quick-fisted dandies. Prostitution was even a form of public assistance, providing jobs for women who would otherwise starve. It strengthened moral attitudes that supported the city's hierarchy of authority, and it permitted the city oligarchy to demonstrate its authority to define and confine evil. (211)

In other words, women were the scapegoat of a patriarchal society based on male authority and necessities. “A social order acknowledging sexuality in men could not survive if men had to treat all women as the Virgin” (Perry 206). In order to maintain a city social order, the civil authority could not rely only on the image of women as the Virgin Mary (pure, nourishing and loving mothers). Women as the “painted prostitute” and Mary Magdalene appeared to be important elements to the same structure. “Ironically this moral system depended as much on symbols of evil as on symbols of perfection” (Perry 206). The Venetian patriarchal society needed women like Veronica Franco, as scapegoats, to justify and nourish their pleasures; these women were the “other” who patriarchy needed in order to expel its sin (male sexuality) and return to its initial Eden. In René Girard’s words:

> … le bouc émissaire doit correspondre à certains critères. Premièrement, il faut que la victime soit à la fois assez distante du group pour pouvoir être sacrifiée sans que chacun ne se sente visé par cette brutalité et en même temps assez proche pour qu’un lien cathartique puisse s’établir (on ne peut expulser que le mal qui est en nous). (21)
>
> The scapegoat must correspond to certain criteria. First of all, the victim needs to be simultaneously distanced enough from the group in order to be sacrificed without anyone feeling targeted by this violence, and close enough in order to maintain a cathartic connection (we can only expulse the evil that lives in us). (My translation)

Women courtesans were the scapegoat ("bouc émissaire") of and for the Venetian patriarchal social structure, which presented these types of women as the source of all sin and, by "scarifying" these same women, it tried to redeem its own integrity.

Despite all the restrictions that confined Renaissance women to the private and domestic sphere by denying them the right to public speech, Veronica Franco advanced in Venetian society and actively participated in intellectual milieus. Before being considered a courtesan, Franco was first of all a poet. She was a marginal woman and an important element in the patriarchal social order, as Perry explains when talking about Seville. However, Veronica Franco, like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz years later, was able, through her literary knowledge, to push herself to the limit of her matriarchal courtesan environment and create her own space of freedom in the liminal space between the matriarchal sub-society of courtesanry and the outside patriarchal social order, crated by men to serve men.[40]

The majority of women during these times were forced to domestic lives and services: either in charge of the household or involved in domestic tasks services, while the ones outside were poor and usually left to prostitution; these were services that did not leave them with enough time to devote to neither literature nor writing. "… married aristocratic women were restricted to the confines of the family structure and were allowed to participate in the workings of public society only from the safe distance of their palazzo windows" (Rosenthal, 234). Courtesans seemed not to be subjected to the strict social, familial, and class ideologies that controlled patrician women's lives and activities. Thus, Veronica Franco was able to publish her work and enter prestigious

[40] See Chapter One pp. 32-39.

literary circles: her condition of courtesan and her friendship with the poet and famous patron of letters, Domenico Venier, made possible her involvement in social issues (women and marginalized groups in Venice). Franco refused the subservient position assigned to her as an object of sexual exchange among elite and patrician men. She created a web of connections with political leaders and intellectuals to associate herself in her own verses with the image of Venice as a "sublime protectress" (Rosenthal 60). Her strategies to receive male patronage resembled the ones by the male courtier who needed to have verbal expertise and a sophisticated verbal domain. "She had to enlist the protection of male patrons willing to defend her reputation as founded not only on sexual labor but on 'honest,' that is 'honorable,' activities (Rosenthal 60-61). Veronica Franco created a web of strategies not only to promote herself in literary circles, but also to defend herself from male interlocutors and detractors. Ann Rosalind Jones noted for both Veronica Franco and the French poet Louise Labé:

> The public nature of their ambitions –the desire to rise socially, to be defined through and benefit from ties with powerful men –led both poets to a contradictory rhetoric. It is a transgressive rhetoric in two senses: they refuse injunctions to chastity and silence, and they speak to and for women in ways that shift the man-woman focus of love poetry to new concerns and positions. But theirs is also a rhetoric shaped and contained by the constant presence of men as the ultimate critics–of women's beauty, of their merit as poets, of their present and future reputations. (316)

Franco wrote her many compositions and familiar letters under the supervision and protection of Domenico Venier[41] while staying in his house and literary *ridotto* (salon); because the protection of a male patron was an important asset to her sexual labor in order to defend her reputation and her "honest/honorable" activities. In her life, Veronica, taught herself how to read and write because women were not allowed to have any literary education. Hiding from her mother and other women, Veronica acquired a vast amount of books and, through them a literary culture that emerges in her writings. For example, by using this literary education, she will be able to defend herself from men who accused her, yet deeply feared her. In 1575, Franco wrote the *capitoli*,[42] a collection of verses in *terza rima* (third rime)[43] that described her life and, at times, defensively provided answers to the accusations of various interlocutors.

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[41] The Venier family was a prominent family in the Republic of Venice who entered the Venetian nobility in the 14th century. Domenico Venier was a Venetian literate born on December 25th 1517 and deceased on February 16th 1582. He was and important magistrate and senator of the Serenissima. At the age of thirty, he renounced to his political career due to a form of gout, which immobilized him and then transformed his house, Santa Maria Formosa, into a center for literary conversation called *ridotto*. Later in life he became the protector of the Venetian *Accademia,* founded in 1558. When Torquato Tasso (1544-95) was eighteen years old, he gave him the *Rinaldo* (1562) for his literary opinion.

[42] The *capitolo* is a series of verses on a specific topic written in *terza rima*. The lenght of the *capitolo* varies: Veronica Franco's shortest *capitolo* is 39 lines long, her longest is 565.

[43] The *terza rima*, also called "rima dantesca" (Rhyme of Dante), was a poetic literary style first used by Dante Alighieri in his *Commedia* (The *Divine Comedy*) of 1321. It is a rhyme scheme that consists of eleven-syllable lines arranged in interlocking tercets in the pattern A-B-A, B-C-B, C-D-C, D-E-D.

Franco refused the subordinated position assigned to her by the patriarchal social structure as an object of amorous exchange. As I explained in Chapter One and earlier in this Chapter, in the liminal space of her matriarchal world, she created a web of connections with political and intellectual men/leaders and, in her lyric writings; she associated herself to the godly image of Venice to present herself as, not only a honest courtesan, but also as a poet and a Venetian citizen. In her verses, Veronica Franco used her "body-weight"[44] as a woman and a courtesan to assimilate herself to the Serenissima in order to give herself power and a specific social civic state that other women did not have during her time. Veronica Franco in her writings is aware of the weight of her body as a courtesan and is able to value every aspect of it. She manipulates her body-weight as a literary technique in order to challenge and eventually subvert the patriarchal social order that marginalized women as inferior (see the *Second Sex* by Beauvoir) and mindless due to the more biological, corporeal, and natural constitution of their bodies. More specifically, Veronica Franco, as a female and a courtesan, indicated her symbolic identity by embodying the city of Venice; she competed with male poets by exploring genres unknown to women and embodying the talents of female authors; and conscious of her female body-weight, she established bonds, connections, and support to other females.

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[44] My idea of the "body-weight," and how Veronica Franco uses it in her writing, comes from the feminist concept of weightiness and embodiment. The philosophy of embodiment and consequential weightiness are fairly recent, even though women had always been seen as "more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men" (Grosz 14). Body images and corporeal schemas serve to socially and culturally constitute us as "sexed, raced, (dis)abled, culturally and nationally positioned" (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-body/). Feminist employed the image of the bodily imaginary influenced by Irigaray and Butler (both largely discussed in this Chapter One).

In her epistolary poems and familiar letters, Veronica Franco became a self-promoter, a public debater, an erotic lover, and a self-justifier to counterpart the negative image of the vulgar and venal courtesan promoted by male satirists' texts.[45] For example, one of the satirists, Francesco Sansovino, in his text *Ragionamento di M. Francesco Sansovino nel quale brevemente s'insegna a giovani huomini la bella arte d'amore* (*Lecture of Mr. Francesco Sansovino by which briefly young men are taught the beautiful art of loving*) (my translation), written in Venice in 1545, explained to the young male listener that while he had to always respect women by being generous, liberal, modest, and honest, he also needed to be careful and avoid any association with courtesans:

> … quelle donne che per piccol pregio vendano lor medesime indegnamente appellate Cortegiane, che usurpano l'altrui roba, che stanno sommersi e perduti nell'otio, che son lievi e volubili come le foglie, che con le parole offendano l'Ott. Mass. Dio che hanno pronta la lingua a i vituperi di questo o di quello. (19)
>
> … women who sell themselves for a small price, unworthy of being called courtesans, [they] usurp the property of others, live immersed and lost in idleness, they use their words to offend our supreme, most Excellent Lord by having a quick tongue when it comes to vituperating this or that person. (My translation)

Another satirist, Sperone Speroni in his *Orazione contra le cortegiane* (*Lecture against courtesans*) (1575) denounced the courtesan's profession and, like Boccaccio before him,

[45] During the sixteenth century, many writers, poets and satirists, like Pietro Aretino, Tomaso Garzoni, Sperone Speroni, and Francesco Sansovino among others, attacked courtesans and their profession as "una antica, ma vile e sozza professione" (an ancient, but vile and filthy profession) (Rosenthal 25). Courtesans were seen as monsters that ruined, with their bodily sins, the décor of beautiful, elegant, and politically just cities such as Venice and Rome.

listed female voices and worthies (Penelope, Artemisia, Diana, among others) to show the real essence of a woman: chastity, heroic virtue, and wifely fidelity. According to Speroni, the courtesans were unworthy of their name ("cotal voce") because it exalted them to the level of the courtier with whom they shared no similarities.

> … chel nome di cortigiano vien veramente da corte; e corte è albergo di cortesia, e cortesia è virtù… or non è dubbio, che da niuna delle virtù della cortesia, non che da molte cosí adunate non prende il nome la Cortigiana; la quale è vuota d'ogni bontà e colma di tutti i vitii… hor, non so come, o per qual cagione l'uso del mondo, che in fatto, e in detto corrotto, le voglia dir Cortegiane: questo so bene, che coati mostri infelici non sono degni di cotal voce. (186-87)
>
> … that the name of the courtier surely derives from the word court, and the court is the abode of courtesy, and courtesy is a virtue… now there is no question that the courtesan does not derive her name from the virtues of courtesy or any others thus acquired for she is devoid of all good and chock-full of vices… Now I do not know how or why it is customary for the world in which both word and deeds are corrupt to insist on calling them courtesans. I know without a doubt that those wretched monsters are unworthy of such a name. (Rosenthal 26)

For this reason, Veronica Franco, in her liminal space of freedom (the patrician house of Domenico Venier), used her body and her ability to write to demonstrate that a courtesan was not a negative figure, but a beautiful female body with an enormous talent in love, speech, and poetry.

VERONICA FRANCO'S *CAPITOLI*: (EM)BODYING THE CITY OF VENICE

The *capitoli* functioned as "propaganda" for all these women who, like Veronica Franco, had to silently stand up and start screaming for their rights and stolen identities. With her *Terze rime*, Veronica Franco wanted to be heard and listened to at a time when the Petrarchan verse was the climax of every literary work (supposedly accessible only to male writers). She mastered the Petrarchan style in her literary work, even though, according to Sara Maria Edler, women writers during the Renaissance tended to use yet subvert the literary Petrarchan verse by making it more personal and intimate:

> The more successful women poets chose to take advantage of their alienation. Wishing to be heard, but not wishing to follow in the footsteps of the Petrarchan establishment, they gained access into the system and "disrupted" it, subverted it; they participated, but critically, allowing for the emergence of more personal, less conventional interpretations of Petrarchan themes… (214)

Veronica Franco decided to show in her writings how well she knew the Petrarchan rules, while she was able to subvert this male construction/genre in order to create and define a new literary genre representative of her feminine being.

Veronica Franco was distinguishable from other women, courtesans, and *meretrici* of her time, because she was first of all a poet which helped her raise her status over time. She used her body, her clothes, and decorum in a different way and, at the same time, wrote verses and poetic anthologies between 1570 and 1580 to affirm her entrance into the Venetian literary and intellectual elite life.

Margaret Rosenthal explains how Veronica Franco differs from the other courtesans by having other abilities besides the necessary to (sexually) satisfy men.

> The *cortigiana onesta*, unlike the common prostitute whose favors were strictly sexual, projected a highly sophisticated public image intended to gain her entry into the aristocratic circle of Venetian public life. Even her dress mimicked the splendor of the noble-woman. (232)

The "cortigiane oneste," unlike the *cortigiana di lume* and the "meretrici" who depended solely on selling their bodies for male pleasures as their only means for financial support,[46] were not only viewed as bodies for the physical pleasure of men, but they were also very educated. They could talk about politics and easily defend themselves in a debate about social issues, economics and, of course, literature. In her writings, Veronica Franco often describes the power of women (as she does in the epigraph I opened this paper with) not only in the literary realm, but also in a rhetorical battlefield. A woman can "fight" as strongly as a man; she can be as delicate and sensible, and as resilient and dangerous.

Veronica Franco's view of Venice public life and of the courtesan's profession was opposed to that of her contemporaries and this manifested in her disregard of political and literary laws, her view of Venice and the use of her body. For instance, even

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[46] In 1592 the Venetian authorities, in an attempt to distinguish the *meretrice* from the *cortigiana*, stated that the former was a woman who either had not married at all and was sexually active with more than one man, or was married but leaving alone, separated from her husband.
"Quelle veramente se intendino esser meretrice quale non essendo maridade haveranno comercio et pratica con uno over più homeni. Se intendano etiam meretrice quelle che havendo marito non habitano con suoi mariti, ma stanno separate et habbino commercio con uno over più homeni. (*Senato terra, 21 February 1542 m.v.*). [Prostitutes are a type of women who, while unmarried, have trade and intercourse with one or more men. Furthermore, prostitutes are a type of women who while married do not live with their husbands, but live apart from them and have intercourse with one or more men] (my translation).

though many laws were passed in an attempt to restrict the activities of Venetian courtesans, Franco continued to actively participate in the intellectual and civic life. During a rebellious time in Venice in which courtesans were seen as evil and the cause of illnesses and decadence in the Serenissima, Veronica Franco was forced to flee from Venice and go to Verona for a short period of time. Here, in her forced exile, she writes a poem in which she recalls her endless love for the Republic and also for her "valoroso amante" (gallant lover), with whom she hopes to reunite soon in the "dolce loco" (sweet place), so called Venice.

Questa la tua fedel Franca ti scrive,
dolce, gentil, suo valoroso amante;
la qual, lunge da te, misera vive…
Oimè, ch'io 'l dico e 'l dirò sempre mai,
che 'l viver senza voi m'è crudel morte,
e i piaceri mi son tormenti e guai…
Vivo, se si può dir che quel ch'assente
da l'anima si trova viver possa;
vivo, ma in vita misera e dolente:
e l'ora piango e 'l dí ch'io fui rimossa
da la mia patria e dal mio amato bene,
per cui riduco in cenere quest'ossa…
Le lacrime, ch'io verso, in parte foco
spengono; e vivo sol de la speranza
di tosto rivedervi al dolce loco…

(Jones & Rosenthal 74)

This your faithful Franca writes you,
tender, well-bred, and gallant lover,
she who in misery lives far away from you…
Alas, I say now and will always say

that life is cruel death to me without you,
and pleasures to me are torments and woes…
I live, if a person can be said to live
who finds herself bereft of her own soul;
I live, but a life of misery and mourning,
and I lament the hour and the day
that I was taken away from my home and my beloved,
for whom my bones now melt into ash…
The tears that I shed quench the fire, in part,
and I live only in the hope
of seeing you soon again, in that sweet place…

(Jones & Rosenthal 75)

In these verses Franco calls herself faithful as a courtesan, an adjective that elevates the courtesan profession. In this elegy, she is faithful to her one lover and also to her city, Venice. She mourns the intimate and loving moments she shared with both her lover and her city while being forcedly away from them. She describes her life as "cruel" without them and how her past "pleasures" turned into "torments." She would only live in the hope of seeing both of them again.

Veronica Franco feels lost without her lover, but mostly without her city, Venice. Her longing for both Venice and her lover created a strong sentiment in Franco that needed to be translated into words. What a better way to represent pain, frustration, and longing for someone than use the Petrarchan voice and style? Veronica Franco, in this poem, echoes not only the poetic style, but also the lamenting voice of Francesco Petrarca in his *Rime* (named later on *Il Canzoniere*). While Petrarca longs for the delightful yet painful love for Laura, who was already married and for whom young Petrarca felt in love at first sight, Veronica Franco contemplated the distance from her lover and her

beloved city; with the latter she shares more than love, both Venice and Franco share the same female body and almost the same faith – we will see later in this Chapter how both Veronica Franco and the city of Venice survive the Inquisition, its terrible punishments, and consequences.

In her *capitoli*, Franco associated herself mostly with the liberty that Venice represented as a city. She took advantage of her female sex to associate her body and her poetic *persona* with the regal female attributes of the city: "dominatrice alta del mare, / regal vergine pura, inviolata" (royal virgin who dominate the sea, pure and inviolate) (Rosenthal 62). In *capitolo* 12 of her *Terze rime*, Veronica Franco exalted Venice as an earthly paradise, the place in which the religious/Christian pleasures met with the profane ones, and praised herself, perhaps indirectly, as one of its devoted citizens and its alter-ego. Through the well-constructed verses, she pays homage to the city's physical beauty and its miraculous creation by the "Re del cielo" (King of heaven) who stops and marvels at the many wonders that Venice represents and that many people acclaim.

In modo dal mondan tutto diviso,
fabricata è Vinegia sopra l'acque,
in questa il Re del cielo si compiacque
di fondar il sicuro, eterno nido
de la sua fé, ch'altrove oppressa giacque;
tutto quel bel, tutta quella dolcezza,
che sia di maggior vanto e maggior grido.

(Franco 128: vv. 37-45)

In a way set part from what is seen on earth,
Venice was built upon waters
according to supernatural, heavenly intent:
In her the King of heaven took pleasure

in founding the secure, eternal nest
of his faith, which elsewhere lay oppressed,
and for his own delight he placed on this shore
all the beauty and all the sweetness
that is most acclaimed and praised on earth.

(Franco 129: vv. 37-45)

Venice is represented here as the miraculous union of Divine, Christian, and earthly pleasures and Veronica Franco indirectly praises herself as one of its most devoted citizens who, although far away from her beloved city, finds a way to remember it in her verses.

Throughout her poem, Veronica Franco seems to foreshadow Hélène Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," a feminist manifesto in which the author states that women should re-conquer their stigmatized bodies, "from which they have been driven away as violently," and start writing for themselves and for other women: "Woman must put herself into the text –as into the world and into history –by her own movement" (875). According to Cixous, women should "return" from their past, from their generationally immobilized bodies, and start writing, not only not to forget, but also to reclaim themselves as human beings, women, and writers.

> Now women return from afar, from always: from "without," from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture;" from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to "eternal rest." The little girls and their "ill-mannered" bodies immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified… Such a display of forces on both sides that the

> struggle has for centuries been immobilized in the trembling equilibrium of a deadlock. (877)

Cixous states that it is important for women to write and to write toward women (to convince women to write their stories), to take up the challenge of speech, which has been governed by the phallus and its logic; a type of writing that will finally bring women back from silence and will confirm them in a new place: a place of female spoken, written and listened words.

If in her epistolary letters she associated her body to that of the city of Venice, similarly to Cixous' feminist statement, Veronica Franco's *capitoli* present the same feminist will to come out of the generational silence and write through a strong female body and its weight. Veronica Franco, throughout her literary work, seems obsessed not only with her body as a courtesan, but also with the female body that was denigrated and demonized for generations by the patriarchal social order. She, almost foreshadowing Cixous' argument, re-takes her body and feels its weight to use it against the patriarchal order and, eventually, gain her freedom as a courtesan and a poet. In her work, Franco uses her body-weight as a literary tool towards the subversion of the patriarchal system and its binary view of the woman as a Madonna/Medusa. In her literary mission to subvert the patriarchal social order, Veronica Franco explores her female body by comparing it to the female body of Venice, a city that was always admired for her beauty and, at the same time, her power. For example, in the verses of *capitolo* 22, also the sea returns constantly to the city's shores to contemplate her beauty and grandeur. The sea pays homage to the regal queen by winding its way through the "various and twisting channels" to admire her splendor above the marble edifices.

... da quell'Adria tranquilla e vaga, a cui
di ciò che in terra un paradiso adorni
non si pareggi alcun diletto altrui:
da quei d'intagli e marmo aurei soggiorni,
sopra de l'acque edificati in guisa,
ch'a tal mirar beltà queto il mar torni;
e perciò l'onda dal furor divisa
quivi manda a irrigar l'alma cittade
del mar reina, in mezzo 'l mar assisa,
a' cui piè l'acqua giunta umile cade,
e per diverso e tortüoso calle
s'insinua a lei per infinite strade.

(Franco 226: vv. 154-65)

… from that tranquil and beautiful Adria,
unequaled by any other land
in whatever adorns a heaven on earth:
from those gold, marble mansions and sculptured stones,
so raised on the waters that the quit sea
turns back to contemplate such beauty;
so that the waves, purged of their fury,
flow here to bathe the blessed city,
queen of the sea, ensconced on the sea,
and the water humbly subsides at her feet,
and by various and twisting channels
winds its way through her along countless paths.

(Franco 227: vv. 154-65)

Finally, this *capitolo* closes with a tribute to the Serenissima and her divine origins. At the time she wrote it, Franco was away from Venice and, thus, she mourned her forced separation from her beloved city and nest. She also associates herself with Venice and her

immaculate birth from the sea. This association allowed her to protect herself from her attackers and the ravages of the Inquisition, just as the impenetrable city continually warded off its own attackers over the centuries. Likewise, Veronica's body is a female body, thus "forte" e *sicuro* (strong and secure), just like the city of Venice that stayed undefeated, even if was never surrounded by walls. Veronica's body survived many accusations and an Inquisition trial with the support of many important men and patrons who she had "enchanted" like the city of Venice used to enchant many visitors, poets, and artists.

Tutto 'l mondo concorre a contemplarla,
come miracol unico in natura,
più bella a chi si ferma più a mirarla;
e senza circondata esser di mura,
più d'ogni forte innaccessibil parte,
senza munizion forte e sicura.
… ad Adria col pensier devoto interno
ritorno e, lagrimando, espressamente
a prova del martir l'error mio scerno.

(Franco 226-30: vv. 172-222)

All the world comes to admire her
as the one and only miracle of nature,
more lovely the longer one lingers to look,
and, though undefended by an outer wall,
a site less accessible than any fortress,
even without ramparts, strong and secure.
… to Adria I return, in deep, loyal thought,
and weeping, to offer proof of my regret,
I clearly perceive the mistake I made.

(Franco 227-31: vv. 172-222)

In this last *stanza*, Franco equates herself to the civic icon of Venice in order to elevate herself as a woman and courtesan of her time. Not only she is trying to find the approval and support of specific patrons, but she is also assimilating her body to the body of Venice in an attempt to elevate the role of women and courtesans in the socio-economic environment of the Serenissima, where women were still subordinated to men and their law. Besides, according to Margaret F. Rosenthal,

> In doing so, Franco anticipated many of the complaints regarding Venetian women's inequality and subjugation raised by other, often more radical, sixteenth-and-early-seventeenth century Venetian protofeminists, such as Moderata Fonte,[47] Arcangela Tarabotti,[48] and Lucrezia Marinella.[49] (64)

Veronica Franco, as her female contemporaries, was aware that she was a woman citizen in a city that was considered the "donzella immaculata" (immaculate maiden). This feminization of the city itself and the myth of her immaculate origins helped restrict women under the power and control of the patriarchal patrician republic and its leaders.

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[47] Moderata Fonte (1555-92), pseudonym of Modesta Pozzo, was a Venetian poetess and writer. She wrote romances and religious poetry, but she is most known for the posthumously pro-women dialogue *Il merito delle donne* (*The Worth of Women* 1600).

[48] Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-52) was a Venetian nun and Early Modern Italian writer. She wrote texts and correspondence with cultural and political figures of her time focusing on the issue of forced enclosure and other systems of patriarchy and misogyny. She is considered a proto-feminist writer and an early political theorist.

[49] Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653) was a Venetian poet and an early advocate of women's rights (during la querelle de femmes). She is best known for her discourse and work *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti e marcamenti de gli huomini* (*The Nobility and Excellence of Women and The Defects and Vices of Men* 1591).

Another correlated event was in the civic ceremony of the "Sensa" (commonly called the "marriage of the sea"), in which the doge (highest political figure in the Venetian Republic), on Ascension day, sailed to the agitated waters of the lagoon to calm the feminized sea ("la mar") by throwing a ring in her watery heart and by marrying her. As Edward Muir has described before, the symbolism of this ritual was characterized by sexual images of male possession of an "unruly" female body.[50] On the contrary, Veronica Franco seems to be addressing this association and dilemma in her *capitoli* and familiar letters by focusing on equality and the mutual pleasure exchange between men and women.

FRANCO'S WILLS: THE PROBLEM OF A COURTESAN'S BODY

In 1577 a terrible plague broke out in Venice and the Republic appointed three additional officers to take control of the "sanitary" conditions of the city and its citizens' sexual practices with specific regulations. These regulations were directed mainly to courtesans and prostitutes in order to limit their circulation in the public sphere. Among the new *Provveditori* (legal officers) elected in 1578, there was Marco Venier, who was Veronica Franco's interlocutor in her *Terze rime* (published three years earlier) and that I will discuss later on in this chapter.

The social expectations of the *cittadine* and of the Venetian noblewomen (including courtesans and "honored" courtesans) were very different in many ways. However, one characteristic remains constant for all women: they wanted to pursue a literary education regardless of their social status, even if the possibility was poor for

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[50] Edward Muir (born in 1946) is a professor of History and Italian at Northwestern University. He was a pioneer in the historical study and research on rituals and feuding. His work focused mostly on Renaissance Italy, especially Venice and its territories. On the marriage of the sea ritual on Ascension Day, see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 119-34.

those Venetian women who did not have the financial and moral support of a father or a father figure. For this reason, Veronica Franco in her two wills presents not only a sense of responsibility for young women belonging to a lower social status or lacking financial resources, but also a deep understanding of how the condition and the body-weigh of being a woman sat heavily on her own and their *personae*.

In early modern society, these particular young women were often denied the privilege of marrying or of an education. "Her bequests to young, undowered women underscore the precarious economic situation in which poor women, who lived on the margins of an affluent, patriarchal society, found themselves in early modern Venice" (Rosenthal 83). Veronica Franco was aware of the problems that young women had to face in their lifetime, due to their female body and condition. She succeeded in educating herself and finding male patrons who supported her intellectual career and pursuits but she neither forgot her female status, nor her commitment to women who were less fortunate than herself.

Her first will was written during her first pregnancy, a moment in which a woman of those days feared for her life. She tried to protect her child and inheritance because, eventually, her body may not have resisted giving birth. Specifically, the body of a courtesan was more debilitated than the body of a married woman, who was respected in its daily functions and less "used" by male necessities.

In her first will (August 10th of 1564), eighteen-year-old Franco writes to secure her children's financial wellbeing and education. At the moment of the stipulation of the will, Veronica Franco was married, pregnant, and therefore in fear for her life. Many

women composed their testaments during pregnancy[51] while men had "generally testated after their families were already born" (Chojnacki 579). Her testament was written in a mixture of colloquial Italian and Venetian dialect and it brings to light Franco's most intimate concerns, fears, and personal affections. She started naming her parents "messer Francesco Francho" and "madonna Paola Fracassa" (this is the only document in which we find her mother's maiden name), and showed a strong attachment to her brothers and to those who were a part of their lives. Also, she tried to remember and pay attention to those women who served her or her family by rewarding them with some money to help their condition. For example, she left ten ducats to Agnesina, the daughter of her brother Orazio's nurse by stating that her bequest needed to be repeated every time Agnesina married. She left another ten ducats to Zinevra, Magdalena's daughter (this woman still remains unidentified) and again for each time the priest and the church declared her married.

> Lasso che sia dato diese ducati alla fia dela nena de mio fradel Horatio la qual nome Agnesina ogni volta che la farà fede de esser maridada, et altri diese a Zenevra fiola de donna Magdalena ogni volta che ch'el piovan de S. Marcilian farà fede la sia maridada. (Rosenthal 112)
>
> I leave ten ducats to my brother Horatio's nurse whose name is Agnesina every time that she will marry, and I leave other ten ducats to the daughter of Madame Magdalena every time that the priest of Saint Marcilian proclaims her married. (My translation)

[51] Natalie Zemon Davis states that women wrote multiple testaments in Lyon during the sixteenth century because they feared dying, especially in childbirth. See "City Women and Religious Change," in her book *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, pp. 68-69.

However, in this first will, she strongly emphasized that everything she owned or ended up owing should be given to the son or daughter to whom she was about to give birth. "Voglio che tutta quell a che me ritrovo al mondo e tutto quello me potesse avegnir cossi mobel come stabel di dentro e di fuora sia de mio fio over fia che nasceranno de mi" (Rosenthal 112) – (I want that everything that I have in this world and everything that I could gain, movable and immovable assets, be given to my son or daughter to whom I will give birth) (my translation). In the middle of her will, Franco starts talking about the supposed father of the child, Jacomo Baballi, a noble merchant from Ragusa (Dubrovnik). For the love that she believes existed between her and Baballi, she asks that he take responsibility for this child.[52]

Veronica Franco wants Baballi to match the capital every year, with five percent interest, "for the benefit of her as-yet-unborn son or daughter until the child reaches legal age" (Rosenthal 76). If the child were to be a boy, the capital had to be placed in the custody of executors that she mentioned by name and Baballi would have to invest all the remaining capital in goods or whatever he thought necessary to secure the child's future financial support. If the child were to be a girl instead, Franco requested that the capital had to be given directly to her in the form of a dowry. Also her daughter's decision to marry had to be approved by Baballi. However, if the child died before reaching legal age, all of her earnings, at five percent, should be given by Baballi to her own mother, Paola Fracassa. Finally, if her mother were to die, she wanted to make sure that the money would go to her three brothers (Hieronimo, Horatio, and Seraphim). An important

[52] Historical reports confirm that in 1558 a "Giocomo Boballi" came to Venice where he remained for twenty years, "becoming one of the merchants active with the Orient and with Ragusa" (Rosenthal 76). He died in Venice in 1577, unmarried.

aspect of this will, is that if all of her relatives were to be dead or died right after, all the capital had to be used for the "balloting system of the six guardians of the Scuole Grandi" –a dowry balloting system for the marriage of poor maidens.[53]

> … io voglio che dapoi la morte de mia madre che tutto il mio cavedal sia ballotado per i sei guardiani dele Schuole Grande che sia maridade tante fie donzele per l'anima mia a venticinque ducati per una, a quelle che haveranno più ballote in fin al numero che importerà el mio cavedal. (Rosenthal 112)
>
> I want that, after my mother's death, all my capital is given to the balloting system of the Scuole Grandi and used by the six guardians to choose many maidens for twenty-four ducats each for my sake, to the ones that will receive more ballots and that my capital can financially cover. (My translation)

Veronica Franco's request was to be put into effect only if she could first provide for her immediate family. The maidens who would receive the greatest number of votes, "ballotte," would be awarded twenty-five ducats, according to the amount remaining from her initial capital, so that they could escape a life of subordination and, perhaps, prostitution.

Throughout her life as a courtesan, Veronica Franco had the situation of women and their wellbeing in mind, as we will see in her letters. She was aware of the terrible difficulties that a lot of women had to go through to reach the little capital that would

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[53] These charitable institutions – *scuole* – received most of their capital from personal endowments and trusts that provided dowries for their members' deserving daughters belonging to poor families and also to rich ones who had suffered unexpected reversals of fortune (Rosenthal 77).

allow them to escape the dangers of the streets and afford a decent life with a husband or in the silent walls of a convent. For this reason, she wanted to make sure that, after her death, if her family was not alive, her money and capital would be given to poor maidens who needed a little extra help in order to be able to pursue a better life, away from prostitution, and with a little dowry to "buy" the favors of a good husband since every year, the officers appointed by the *Scuole Grandi* were responsible for identifying the young girls and reviewing their reputation in the neighborhood to make sure they deserved the capital for that year as a present/dowry.

Veronica Franco's interest in charitable causes in aid of less fortunate Venetian women who were too poor to be able to support themselves was not only present in her will. It also reemerges in one of her *Familiar Letters* – in the letter 22 that we will analyze later on in this chapter– in which Franco advises a mother not to allow her daughter to become a courtesan "Since she was unequipped to enter the higher ranks of courtesanry because she was not talented and not sufficiently beautiful, Franco suggests that her addressee's daughter enter the Casa delle Zitelle instead" (Rosenthal 77).[54]

This first will ends with a last, but very important and peculiar request: Franco asks her mother to demand the restitution of her dowry from her husband, Paolo Panizza, and to keep the sum for herself since she gave it to her daughter to use. "La mia dote io voglio che mia madre se la possa far dare a mio marido messer Paolo Panizo e far quel tanto che lei piacerà como quella che me l'ha data" (Rosenthal 112). (I want my mother to ask my husband Paolo Panizo for my dowry and do with it whatever she pleases like

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[54] The *Casa delle Zitelle* (The house for unmarried girls/women) was a charitable institution founded in the sixteenth century to provide economic assistance to selected unmarried girls –and sometimes to widowed and single women – whose families were unable to support them. As far as the Republic was concerned, it was also designed to safeguard the girls' virginity with their reputation and their family's honor (Rosenthal 77-78).

when she gave it to me) (my translation). This part of the will is important because it suggests that her father did not contribute to her dowry, but that her mother alone, with some money saved from her profession, had put a little capital aside to assure a respectful marriage for her daughter. It is interesting to notice that Veronica Franco wanted to do the same not only for her daughter (if the unborn child was a daughter), but also maidens who were less fortunate than her and in need of help to have a better life. With this last request in her first will, she also reversed the patriarchal social law and bureaucracy by asking back for the money that was given to a man, Paolo Panizza, as a dowry. This money was a present for the future husband to secure the woman's life into a better environment of protection and economic security. Veronica Franco, with her will, ended this "contract" – as the marriage was considered a political and economical contract between families. She wanted another woman, her mother, who secured her daughter's life with a little sum that she had saved, to have it. Finally, as a sign of gratitude and affection, she concluded the will with the request of leaving her diamond ring to Jacomo de Baballi who was the man that she obviously (considering the many times she mentioned him in this first will) trusted not only personally, but also financially.

In her second will Veronica Franco's body weight is again "dictating" her life, as she is highly aware of her female body and her bond to other females. While the first will was instigated by the risk of giving birth, Veronica Franco's second and final will (November 1st, 1570) seems to be incentivized not only by the unstable political situation of Venice (including the war in Cyprus and the many environmental conditions that the

Veneto region faced over a ten year period),[55] but also by her body being immobilized due to a deadly sickness.

Venice experienced military defeat with the fall of Cyprus, and in the following months it had its great victory by sea: the battle of Lepanto on October 7th 1571. According to Ferdinand Braudel, Venice was in a way unprepared for the defeat at Famagusta, because it "had been at peace for thirty years… and was extremely short of man power and totally lacking in food supplies" (2: 1084-85). Moreover, during this time, Franco's personal life had changed from her last will six years earlier: her mother Paola had passed away in 1570 and Jacomo Baballi was no longer part of her life. However, Franco's second will returns to the question of the paternity of her children and their future. Again, she starts the will by stating that she is the daughter of Franco (Francesco) Francho and that she is currently in bed, sick, in the parish of San Tomà. For this reason she wanted to call a notary from Venice to assign her possessions:

> Considerando io Veronica Francho fiola del messer Franco Francho, li pericoli di questa nostra fragil vita sana per la Iddio gratia dilla mente, senso, memoria et intelletto, benchè alquanto dil corpo inferma in leto, ho voluto sin che la raggion reggi la mente, di beni miei disponer et ordinar; et cussì ho fatto venir et chiamar de me Baldissera Fiume nodaro di Venezia qui in casa mia posta nella contra di San Thoma… (Rosenthal 113)

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[55] During 1569, both Venice and the Veneto region experienced heavy rains and flooding that damaged all the grain harvest and caused severe famine and illnesses –the most devastating one was a typhus epidemic and the plague of 1575 (Paul F. Grendler, *Roman Inquisition*, 25-29 and Fabio Mutinelli, *Annali urbani di Venezia dell'anno 810 al 12 maggio 1797*, Venice: G.B. Merlo, 1841: 167-68).

> I, Veronica Franco daughter of Messer Franco Francho, find important to consider the dangers of our fragile life and to thank God's grace for giving me the health of mind, senses, memory, and intellect; even if my body is laying in bed sick, I wanted to divide and assign my possessions, considering that my mind has full capacity; for this reason I asked Baldassar Fiume, notary of Venice, to come to my house in the parish of San Thoma. (My translation)

After her brief biographical introduction, she changes her executors from Baballi to Lorenzo Moresini (a member of the Venetian Council of Ten), her brother Hieronimo, and Ludovico Ramberti, a descendant of one of the most respected merchant families of Venice.[56] The latter member of her executors list, Ramberti, will leave Veronica's son, Achiletto, a farmhouse on the Island of Ca' Manzo near Chioggia. He also requested in his will that Veronica shared the house with Achiletto until he reached twenty-five years of age –after which he would be the sole owner of the property. Also, Ramberti made sure that, if Veronica passed away and, in her own will, she left less to Achiletto than to her other son, Enea, then Achiletto had to receive the usufruct payments that his mother had received over the years. "By 1570, then, many of the men to whom Franco entrusted her children's future were members of extremely prestigious Venetian patrician and

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[56] Ludovico Ramberti, at the time of Veronica's second will, was the owner of an apothecary shop in the area of Rialto bridge and was known in Venice for a scandal surrounding his brother Pietro a couple of years before. In 1540, "Ludovico had attempted to save his brother's life from capital punishment [followed his crimes] by giving him a deadly poison on the eve of his execution when he visited him in his prison cell" (Rosenthal 79). Ludovico's strategy saved his brother from punishing himself; for this reason he was regarded as an example of fraternal love and devotion and was sentenced only to a four-year banishment from the Serenissima. "When he met Veronica, thirty years later, he undoubtedly had reacquired the privileged status that his family had long enjoyed" (Rosenthal 79).

merchant families" (Rosenthal 79). Throughout her second will, she restates that her first son, Achiletto (the one with whom she is pregnant in the first will), is the son of Jacomo Baballi Raguseo; while her second son, Enea, is the son of Andrea Tron of Paolo Tron.[57]

Franco wants to make sure in this will that her executors will sell all of her possessions after her death and invest the sum acquired into a secure trust fund for her sons and also for Andrea, her maid's son, whom she accepted as an adopted son ("… Andrea qual ho accetato per fio d'anima" –Rosenthal 113). As she did in her previous will, at the end of this second one, she considers young women in her life and makes sure they also receive some ducats to improve their lives. If their sons (including Andrea) want to become friars, she wants that fifty ducats go to Marina, "probably an adopted daughter," for her marriage, or, if she was already married and had no money on her own, she still had to receive that money for her wellbeing (Rosenthal 80). If their sons do not become friars, Franco nevertheless wants them to have the money equally divided. Also, she states that if one of them should die before the other one, the one alive should receive the total amount of the share. In this last will, Franco considers giving her father fifty ducats in three installments – a system that she did not use for her mother (indicating that, perhaps, she did not trust her "carissimo padre" much). Moreover, almost at the end of her dispositions, she bequeaths the balance of her remaining capital to the children of her brother Hieronimo and, at this point, she comes out with another striking request: if her sister in law were to give birth to a daughter, then this last child should be granted with the entire amount of her balance. "… occorrendo che sua moglie facesse una fiola in questo caso tutta ditta restante vadi a ditta puta con questo che gli sii messo nome

[57] Andrea Tron was married to Beatrice de Lezze in 1569 and was the son of Paolo Tron, an important senator of Venice. If we accept Veronica Franco's word, Andrea Tron's affair is an example and evidence that patricians continued to see courtesans after marriage.

Veronica al batesimo" – and be named Veronica the day of her baptism (Rosenthal 114). If they were to have only male children, then the capital would have to be divided equally among them. Veronica also names her other brother Serafin, who fought and was captured by the Turks, and she assures that if he ever needed money, he may be allowed to use part of her fortune (approximately two hundred ducats).

Unlike the first will in which Veronica carefully divides the capital among her children and extended family, in this one she provides for her father, children, and her brother's family. Besides, whereas in the first will she makes sure that her charity goes to the dowry system of the *scuole grandi,* in this second and last one, she leaves the surplus of her capital for the marriage of specifically "two worthy maidens." She also adds that, if two prostitutes ("due meretrici") who wanted to leave the wicked life and enter a convent or marry were to be found, then, the capital should have been given to them and not to the two maidens.

> … in questo caso voglio che il mio residuo sii dato a due donzelle da bon per il suo maridar. Che se si ritroverà due meretrici che volessero lassar la cattiva vita etmaritarsi o monacharsi, in questo caso sii abrazado ditti dui meretrici et non le donzelle… (Rosenthal 114)
>
> … in this case I want that my money residue is given to two maidens for a good marriage. Given that two prostitutes are found who want to leave the wicked life and get married or enter a convent, in this case my money should be given to the two protitutes and not to the maidens… (My translation)

The end of Franco's second will becomes a picture of her daily life as she remembers it and provides for other women in her life, maids, servants, merchants, and their respective families… also including nuns. For example: to Agnese, her past cook, she leaves four to six ducats for her salary; to Domisilla, her present maid, she gives all the things that he had given to Caterina, her previous maid, and that needed to be recovered and given to Domisilla –items that had an estimated value of four or five ducats. To sor Marina, a nun in the monastery of San Bernardin in Padua, she leaves ten ducats in one payment as soon as Franco's goods be sold. Even in the second will, Veronica Franco was concerned with women and their financial future; she kept in mind all the women around her, even the ones that were not yet born (like the eventual daughter of her brother) in order to assure them the possibility to escaping potentially abusive and dangerous conditions.

At the time of her second and last will, Veronica Franco was twenty-five years old and, once again, the condition of her body forced her to write and to leave some of her fortune to her direct family as well as to women that could have their life improved with some of her financial help. Both of her wills reveal a sense of sisterhood and responsibility for young women who, due to a lack of financial support or to a lower social status, were denied the privileges of marriage or of an education. Her interest in the wellbeing of young women underscores the dangers of a patriarchal society and the precarious financial structure in which poor and marginal women lived and dealt with everyday in early modern Venice. Despite the fact that Veronica fought it, and succeeded in educating herself by attracting male patrons who supported her intellectual pursuits and protected her, she never forgot her commitment to other women less fortunate than herself.

> While the social expectations of a *cittadina* and a noblewoman, not to mention a courtesan and an "honest" courtesan, were very different, one factor remains constant for all women who wanted to pursue a literary vocation, regardless of social standings or class: as already noted, without the financial and moral support of a father or a father figure who saw personally to a young woman's education, a Venetian woman had little hope of establishing a secure literary identity of her own. (Rosenthal 83)

Veronica did not have a father figure in her life who gave her the means to elevate her social status as a woman, even if she belonged to the *cittadini* rank; she used what her mother gave her to educate herself and surround herself with male patrons, such as Domenico Venier, who admired her, not only for her beauty and physical traits, but for her literary expertise, which made her one of the most famous and educated courtesans of Venice. Veronica Franco learned the art of courtesanry from her mother and was subjected to the matriarchal rules that this type of mini-society created for her and for another courtesan women. However, Venier's patrician house gave a lot of literary respect to Franco, which allowed her *persona* to find a liminal space of gender freedom between her original matriarchal environment and the bigger patriarchal system. Venier's house functioned as that liminal space of freedom in which she stopped performing the marginal female gender role and she gained enough literary strength and independency to start destabilizing the outside phallocentric patriarchal system.

UNDRESSING THE COURTESAN: VERONICA FRANCO'S FAMILIAR LETTERS – *LETTERE FAMIGLIAR AI DIVERSI*

On November 4th 1580, Michel de Montaigne[58] visited Venice and, on this occasion, Veronica Franco's servant delivered him a copy of her recently published *Lettere familiari ai diversi* (Familiar Letters to Various)[59] and Montaigne recorded them in his *Journal de voyage en Italie*: "Le lundy a souper, 6 de novembre, la signora Veronica Franca, gentifame venitienne, envoia vers lui pour lui presenter un petit livre de lettres qu'elle a composé; il fit donner deux escus audit home" (72). – Monday at dinner time, on November 6th, Signora Veronica Franco, a Venetian woman, sent a servant to his house to present him a little volume of letters that she had composed; he received the order to pay the servant two *scudi* (my translation). Also, Montaigne insisted that "Ce sont grands imprimeurs de lettres que les italiens. J'en ay, ce crois-je, cent divers volumes" (305). –There are no greater printers of letters than the Italians. I think that I have a hundred different volumes of them (my translation). One of these hundred examples of Italian letters that Montaigne possessed was Veronica Franco's collection of fifty familiar letters, which form part of Italy's epistolary tradition.

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58 Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) is one of the most famous philosophers of the French Renaissance, known for making the essay a literary genre. He wrote the *Journal de voyage en Italie, par la Suisse et l'Allemagne, en 1580 et 1581* during a tour of Italy through Switzerland and Germany between 1580 and 1581.

59 The only copy of Franco's *Lettere familiari ai diversi*, published in Venice, survives in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice. For this reason, it seems that only a few copies were originally printed. "The name of the publisher is not recorded, and there is no "privilegio" (copyright)" (Rosenthal 305). Benedetto Croce collected some of Franco's letters in a modern edition that includes a critical essay, an analysis of its textual background, and an iconographical note on Veronica Franco. Croce's volume is called *Lettere dall'unica edizione del MDLXXX con proemio e nota iconografica* (Naples: Ricciardi, 1949). "Before Croce, some of Franco's letters were anthologized by Bartolomeo Gamba in *Lettere di donne italiane del secolo XVI* (Venice: Alvisopoli, 1832)" (Rosenthal 305).

Pietro Aretino[60] was the first Italian writer who used familiar letters in the first part of the Sixteenth century, not only to advertise his reputation, but also to criticize some imitators of classical authors. According to Aretino, the epistolary genre needed to be inspired by nature and the environment. He believed that nature should be the great teacher of art and, for this reason, artists and writers should follow natural stimuli to create their own pieces of art. Aretino challenged the authority of classical models by opposing his hyperbolic and baroque use of vernacular tongue to the ancient authors' structured and controlled Latin. Francesco Sansovino took Aretino's theory of nature and proclaimed that the *body* of the letter should reflect not only the order of nature but also the *physical proportions* of the ideal human form: "il corpo della lettera, come corpo deve aver le sue membra, onde di necessità bisogna che abbia regole e norme, poi ch'ogni corpo ha le membra proporzionate l'una all'altra" (193-95). –The body of the letter like a body needs to have its limbs, thus the need to have rules and norms so that the limbs of the body are proportionate to each other (my translation). Even though, many contemporaries refused to accept Pietro Aretino as the epistolary model, he proclaimed himself the inventor of the Italian familiar epistole:

> Si è scoperto nelle orecchie dello intelletto un tuono di pistole che spaventerebbe i fulmini che cascono dal cielo de i concetti di Cicerone…

[60] Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) was an Italian author, playwright, poet, satirist, and blackmailer who influenced modern art and politics. He wrote *La cortigiana* – The Courtesan (1525), which was a parody of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. It features the adventures of Messer Maco, who travels to Rome to become a cardinal.

> io entro in questo discorso, perché le mie prime lettere, che in lingua nostra sieno state impresse, nascon da me. (Martelli 28-29)[61]
>
> A rumble of epistles that could frighten the lightning, which falls from the heavens of Cicero's concepts has been discovered by the ears of the intellect… I am part of this because the first letters to be printed in our language come from me. (My translation)

Veronica Franco, in her familiar letters, indirectly responded to Aretino's theory of nature and his denunciation of the rhetorical artifice used by others in the epistolary prose; "a denunciation made by equating rhetorical artifice with the calculated artfulness of the courtesan's façade" (Rosenthal 121).

By the time Veronica Franco published her letters, five years after her *Terze rime*, Aretino "self-congratulatory claim to be the inventor of a vernacular genre" (Rosenthal 117) had been overshadowed by the many other epistle-writers in Italian who had been admitted and admired in privileged ranks. In the second half of the sixteenth century Italy, epistolary authors and writers were rarely women, with the exception of a few aristocratic women such as Lucrezia Gonzaga[62] and Vittoria Colonna,[63] who had published their letters in the earlier part of the century. By focusing on the private

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[61] Nicolo Martelli (1498-1555) was a young Florentine merchant who met Aretino in Rome. He was one of the founders of the literary academy *Accademia degli Umidi* born in Florence in 1540.

[62] Lucrezia Gonzaga di Gazzuolo (1522-76) was an Italian noblewoman known for her literary talents and her friendship with Matteo Bandello. Bandello taught her mathematics, astronomy, logic, and rhetoric; also he dedicated some of his poems to her while he was staying at the court of Luigi Gonzaga. A volume of her letters was published in Venice in 1552.

[63] Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547) was one of the most important and successful woman writers of her time. She was known for her impeccable Petrarchan verse (mostly dedicated to the love and devotion for Christ) and her chaste image. A first edition of her *Rime* was published in 1538 and was followed by twelve further published editions before her death in 1547. Colonna's published work is not limited to poetry, she also wrote prose on religious matters, initially written as letters.

feminine concerns usually expressed in vernacular familiar letters – blending the public and private *personae* – Veronica Franco, in her familiar letters, presented a public version of a courtesan's private life and self that counter-parted the male authors' representation of the courtesan as a venal, wicked, and duplicitous woman.

> Franco's letters thus blur the distinctions between a public and private voice; her private thoughts are formulated in a public genre, which she uses to represent both the shared principles of her class and the specific women's concerns for the period. (Rosenthal 117)

However, with her familiar letters, she focused on a genre in which very few women had published; she used this type of writing to publicize her private thoughts and feelings in a public arena. By 1580, Veronica Franco was the only woman who had published her familiar letters in many years. Moreover, when she dedicated her volume to the Cardinal "Monsignor Luigi d'Este," she explored another genre that was unknown to Sixteenth century women: the confessional autobiography.

Franco wrote her letters over a long period of time. They are not dated, but from the content we can judge that some of them were written before her *terze rime* (*Third Rhymes* in verses) while others come right after. Some critics such as Arturo Graf and Antonio Tassini have considered Franco's voice in her familiar letters as a courtesan's *confessional autobiography*, but, according to Margaret Rosenthal they have failed in recognizing how Franco redirects classical and Renaissance literary genres toward "a literary epistolary voice capable of expressing views in favor of Renaissance women, unrelated to the affairs of the heart" (117). What is notable in Franco's epistolary writing is the way she skillfully interweaved classical references into her discourse and

challenged classical epistolary traditions. For example, in letters 13 and 14, Franco quoted directly from Cicero, even if she altered his words to fit her design. In the first one, she writes a letter to a man to invite him over for a "lieta conversazione" (pleasant conversation). Her house will provide him with warmth and refuge: " 'l tempo tutto volto alla pioggia" (while the weather is characterized by rain); and, in return, his conversation and company will reward as well as comfort her: "Tra quanti favori ch'io potessi ricever della vostra gentilezza a me sarà sopr'ogn'altro caro che mi facciate grazia di lasciarvi goder oggi in lieta conversazione" – Among the many favors I could receive through your kindness, the best of all will be that you do me the favor of enjoying some pleasant conversation today (Jones & Rosenthal 32). She also invited him to dine with her and to bring along a bottle of his "malvasia" wine.

> Se vi degnerete di venir, potremo desinar caritevolmente insieme, *sine fuco et cerimoniis more maiorum*, di quella grazia che ci sarà. E se vorrete aggiungervi un fiaschino di quella vostra buona malvasia, di tanto mi contento e di più non vi condanno. – If you will deign to come, we will be able to partake together *sine fuco et cerimoniis more maiorum* [without pomp and ceremony in the manner of our ancestors] of whatever food there will be. And should you add to it a small flask of your excellent *malvasia*, I will be quite happy and not ask for more. (Rosenthal 146)

This letter echoes the classical decorum and she also quotes Cicero's first letter to Atticus, but replaces some words to follow her letter's content and context. In Cicero's epistle, he talks about his prospective candidacy for the consulship and wants to inform

Atticus that only Galba was running and that fortunately he had already been turned down:

> Petitionis nostrae, quam tibi summae curae esse scio, huiusmodi ratio est, quod adhuc coniectura provideri possit. Pensat unus P. Galba: sine fuco ac fallaciis more maiorum negatur" – With regard to my candidature, in which I know you take the greatest interest, things stands as follows, so far as one can guess at present. P. Galba is the only canvasser who is hard at work; and meets with a plain and simple, old-fashioned, no. (Rosenthal 146)

Franco reproduced the opening lines of Cicero's letter, but she switched the word "fallaciis" for the word "ceremoniis;" she also excluded the technical political context and words "pensat" and "negatur" which represented Cicero's concerns with the political campaign. While Cicero stressed political competition, Veronica Franco recreated a pleasant atmosphere for light conversation; she invited her guest to dine with her without "pretense or ceremony, in the customs of our ancestors."

The genre of the familiar epistle, inherited from Ciceronian, Stoic, and Christian moral traditions, was imitated and often discussed in the literary academies of the Serenissima and, most certainly, in Domenico Venier's salon. Many theorists, such as Girolamo Ruscelli, Francesco Sansovino, Giovanni Battista Guarini, Girolamo Garimberto, Angelo Ingegneri, and Orazio Toscanella, recognized that classical epistles translated into the vernacular displayed knowledge of civic, moral, and social conventions. Thus, Veronica Franco in her letter 22 stated that her letter was an "officio" (duty) created by the "obbligo dell'umanità" (human obligation) to increment

conversation in “familiarità” (familiarity). Also, the act of writing letters was something typical for women who wanted or needed to be in contact with family and loved ones. They used to send letters written by themselves or by men who were “scrivani” (scribes) by profession).

> From the fourteenth century on… Women continued to write devotional literature… They also wrote diaries, often intended as keepsakes for their children; books of advice to their sons and daughters; letters to family members and friends; and family memoirs, in a few cases elaborated enough to be considered history. (Jones & Rosenthal xxi)

Throughout her *Familiar Letters to Various*, Franco became a moral counselor, writer, and editor of different collaborative projects, “as well as devoted friend, mother uninterested in financial gain, affectionate companion, and partner in love” (Rosenthal 123). Many critics have discussed Franco’s conversational tone in her letters as a representation of the fallen body of a courtesan, a repentant Mary Magdalene. However, according to Rosenthal, Franco’s conversational style represents a demonstration of the typical structures and social decorum of familiar letters by using, strangely, a plain unadorned speech. “She uses the rhetorical style to draw attention to her avoidance of rhetorical embellishment” (123). Moreover, Franco’s lack of a clearly defined rhetorical structure in her epistles has been recently defined by Amedeo Quondam as “più prossime alla forma della lettera segmento di narrazione, la lettera ‘novella’ di cui parlava il Martelli” (57) – closer to the letter part of the narration, the ‘novella’ [new] letter to which Martelli was referring (my translation). In my opinion, she uses her unadorned rhetorical style and colloquial speech, not only to self-portrait her private and public life,

but also to provide consolation and advice to troubled interlocutors and to advocate for the rights of women.

Franco's letters touched on many different topics and situations that provided traces of a courtesan's interaction with her surroundings, and, therefore, could be read as short separate essays. In her *Lettere familiari ai diversi*, she denounced the hypocrisy of the patriarchal socio-political rhetoric and practices that often denied personal freedom to many citizens, mostly to women. Once again, in her letters as well as in her wills, Veronica Franco is concerned not only with her own body, but also with women's bodies that were continuously subjected to a hard-to-escape patriarchal system of slavery – that went from the "simple" giving birth to the physical and moral violence on another courtesans' body. "It's a most wretched thing, contrary to human reason, to subject one's body and labor to a slavery terrifying even to think of" (*Letter* 22, Jones, Rosenthal 39).

Veronica Franco is constantly concerned with the female body, not only with her own, but also with other women's body and its changes. She sees pregnancy as one of the biggest changes in a woman's body; a change that a woman had to undertake alone while fearing for her life –many women wrote their wills during pregnancies, as Veronica did, because they were afraid that their "weak" body was not able to survive the condition of giving birth (see note n. 52) For example, in letter 16, she addresses an upper-class woman who recently gave birth to a little boy, "un così bel bambino maschio" – such a beautiful little boy, and congratulates her by complimenting the rewards and tranquility of her social status. In this letter, Franco praises to the comforts of being born in a "degna famiglia" – worthy family, and the fact that the little boy is a male-patrician who will, in

the future, have all the privileges of the patriarchal society.[64] Veronica tries to make the woman feel good, not only by highlighting her strength to go through a pregnancy, but also by emphasizing the social comforts that both, herself and her son, will have for being born in a Patrician family. In letter 30, Ann Rosalind Jones argues that Franco emphasizes women's willingness to take on aggression and injustices of men in an act of "vassalage" (*The Currency* 186). Rather than being a vassal herself, I believe that Veronica Franco is fighting against women's "vassalage" to men and, by defending this woman, she is starting a greater defense of women that will continue throughout her life and work. This defense will echo in her *capitolo* 24 in which Franco speaks in favor of a fellow courtesan who had been innocently attacked by a man not only with his "lingua acuta," (sharp tongue/mouth) but also with physical disfigurement; the woman, on the other hand, had taken the offence with patience.

Dunque a la mia presenza vi fu opposto
ch'una donna innocente abbiate offesa
con lingua acuta e con cor male disposto:
e che, moltiplicando ne l'offesa,
quent'è colei più stata paziente…

(Jones & Rosenthal 242)

[64] Letters 4, 14, and 18 present the same discourse on aristocratic male privileges, which differs from the female privileges that Franco highlights in other letters.

So in my presence you were accused
of having offended an innocent woman
with your sharp tongue and ill-disposed heart;
and, multiplying what you did wrong,
the more patient she remained…

(Jones & Rosenthal 243)

Franco's *lettere familiari ai diversi* creates an epistolary genre that criticizes the strong inequality between men and women and reclaims women's inexistent rights. Also, by concentrating graphically and visually on the body of these women, she gives more "weight" to her argument and her defense. She sees the female body as a tool toward independence and freedom. Veronica Franco in her *lettere* redeems the stigmatized female body from the patriarchal idea that women were vicious, mean, and inclined to sin due to the nature of their bodies. She is not only concerned about the female body and its social use, but she also sees the female body as the tool for self-redemption, salvation and feminine re-appropriation.

A specific case of concern for other women's bodies appears in letter 22, in which Veronica Franco writes to a friend courtesan who wanted her daughter to become a courtesan herself. Franco realizes the many difficulties for a woman to make the right choice when lacking the necessary freedom, economic means, and social status and makes it implicit in her letter. She understands that many Venetian women were forced to morally precarious positions due to either class inferiority or gender.

> Consider the likely outcome; and if you want to observe other cases, look at what's happened and happens every day to the multitude of women in

> this occupation. If you can be convinced by reason, every argument about this world and all the more about heaven opposes you and urges you to avoid this fatal course. Turn your hopes to God and take advantage of the help you friend offers you. (Jones & Rosenthal 40)

In Franco's view, many Venetian women were forced into prostitution ("this occupation") that slowly undressed them from their dignity, personal freedom, and human belief. She then urged her friend to take her advice and her financial help to save her daughter from a life of slavery and danger. Many critics have argued that, in this letter, Franco denounces the horrors of a life of prostitution and signals her initial repentance as a move toward conversion. However, I agree with Margaret Rosenthal who believes that Veronica Franco's goal was to raise the ideological assumptions that forced an innocent young girl and her mother into a morally compromising situation – I would also push it further by saying that Franco is not looking at one specific case but she is analyzing one case (the one of her friend's daughter) to openly criticize the current situation of all young girls who found themselves trapped in strict patriarchal ideologies and could not freely choose their future, a situation that eventually reflects Franco's own adolescence in which she was unable to decide for herself. Franco describes a picture of female subjugation, violence, and inferiority to which she strongly opposes. I again agree with Rosenthal when she states that Veronica Franco is not repentant rather full of indignation toward the situation of Venetian women and the fact that they were forced into their destiny by a bigger and outsider patriarchal force.

Again in letter 22, Franco describes the unfortunate situation that many impoverished Venetian women faced and urged the courtesan mother to strip her

daughter from the embellishment that made her look like a dressed-up-whore (a woman seen as an ornament by men and for men's pleasures). Howard R. Bloch reviews the question of woman conceived as an ornament in early misogynist essays and writings. He argues that:

> … to decorate oneself is to be guilty of "meretricious allurement," since embellishment of the body, a prideful attempt "to show to advantage," recreates an original act of pride that is the source of potential concupiscence. This is why Tertulian is able to move so quickly and naturally from the idea of dress to a whole range of seemingly unapparent associations… between transvestism and the monstrous; or between the toga and lust, adultery, cannibalism, intemperance, and greed. It is as if in each and every act of clothing an original nakedness associated with the sanctity of the body, and not the weakness of the flesh, were a corrupting recapitulation of the Fall entailing all other perversions. (12)

Bloch recognizes that the exasperated ornamentation of the body is connected to a misogynist discourse and he extends it to the view of the woman as an ornament.[65] In the same vein, Franco urges the courtesan-mother to "undress" her daughter from too much clothing, ornaments, and vulgar finery in order to liberate her from deceiving male

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[65] The question of excessive ornamentation will be retaken by later Venetian proto-feminists of the seventeenth century, such as Lucrezia Marinella and Arcangela Tarabotti, who will argue against it in their treatises and familiar letters.
Also, Jacqueline Lichtenstein writes: "The innumerable critics of rhetoric, in fact, have generally condemned such Asiatic stylistic figures in a vocabulary borrowed from the lexicon of the prostituted body, from the indecent attire and the profligate sexuality of women, as if every manifestation of an excessive taste for images could only be thought of through the aesthetic-moral category of perversity, of a culpable seduction that originates in a certain femininity" (79) – see Jacqueline Lichtenstein, "Making Up Representation: The Risk of Femininity," *Representations* 20 (1987): 77-87.

suitors. According to Franco, the woman's daughter was not fine and beautiful and was lacking the important "grace and wit in conversation;" fundamental characteristics that an "honored" courtesan needed to have to be able to defend herself and live a life that was minimally better. The "grace and wit in conversation" was what saved Veronica Franco from being trapped in a marginal position chosen by men to regulate their patriarchal view of society. Franco's rebellious nature and her different inclinations allowed her to move from the marginal matriarchal position of a simple courtesan to the freer position of a liminal courtesan – a new type of courtesan that stopped performing the fixed binary gender roles and could move freely from the matriarchal world of courtesanry and the patriarchal social structure through the *liminality* of her written words.

> Now, finally, I wanted to be sure to write you these lines, urging you again to beware of what you're doing and not to slaughter in one stroke your soul and your reputation, along with you daughter's – who, considered from the purely carnal point of view, is really not very beautiful (to say the least, for m eyes don't deceive me) and has so little grace and wit in conversation that you'll break her neck expecting her to do well in the courtesan's profession, which is hard enough to succeed in even if a woman has beauty, style, good judgment, and proficiency in many skills. And just imagine a young woman who lacks many of these qualities or has them only to an average degree. (*Letter* 22, Jones & Rosenthal 39)

Throughout her familiar epistle, Franco keeps on insisting that her motivation to write is dictated by "familiar concern," and that she decided to write down her concerns in the

form of a letter because it seemed that her spoken words were either unsuccessful or not heard.

With letter 22, Franco, not only provides advice to a friend on a personal level, but also challenges and subverts the satirical portrait of a courtesan in Aretino's *Sei giornate* in which a young woman, Pippa, is educated into the courtesan's world and profession by her own mother, Nanna. The latter is a former courtesan/prostitute and she enjoys teaching her daughter all the tricks and aspects of the job. On the contrary, Franco's letter describes the horror of a patriarchal social context in which young women happened to be constrained without too much choice, mostly when they lose their virginity:

> Voi sapete quante volte io v'abbia pregata e ammonita ad aver cura della sua virginità; e, poi che il mondo è così pericoloso e così fragile e che le case delle povere madri non sono punto sicure dall'insidie amorose dell'appetitosa gioventù, vi mostrai la via di liberarla dal pericolo e di giovarle nella buona instituzione della vita e nel modo da poterla onestamente maritare. (Rosenthal 128)
>
> You know how often I've begged you and warned you to protect her virginity. And since this world is so full of dangers and so uncertain, and the houses of poor mothers are never safe from the amorous maneuvers of lustful young men, I showed you how to shelter her from dangers and to help her by teaching her about life in such a way that you can marry her decently. (*Letter* 22, Jones & Rosenthal 38)

Franco is concerned and aware that young poor women who lost their virginity, due to a lack of protection in their mothers' houses, were forced to enslave their bodies to someone else's desire and will. She eloquently reminds the mother and the reader about the horrors of living under somebody else's control. She continues:

> Troppo infelice cosa e troppo contraria al senso umano è l'obligar il corpo e l'industria di una tal servitù che spaventa solamente a pensarne. Darsi in preda di tanti, con rischio d'esser dispogliata, d'esser rubbata, d'esser uccisa, ch'un solo un dì ti toglie quanto con molti in molto tempo hai acquistato, con tant'altri perioli d'ingiuria e d'infermità contagiose e spaventose; mangiar con l'altrui bocca, dormir con gli occhi altrui, muoversi secondo l'altrui desiderio, correndo in manifesto naufragio sempre della facoltà e della vita; qual manggiore miseria? quai ricchezze, quai commodità, quai delizie posson acquistar un tanto peso? Credete a me: tra tutte le sciagure mondane questa è l'estrema; ma poi, se s'aggiungeranno ai rispetti del mondo quei dell'anima, che perdizione e che certezza di dannazione è questa? (Rosenthal 133)
>
> It's a most wrecked thing, contrary to human reason, to subject one's body and labor to a slavery terrifying even to think of. To make oneself prey to so many men, at the risk of being stripped, robbed, even killed, so that one man, one day, may snatch away from you everything you've acquired from many over such a long time, along with so many other dangers of injury and dreadful contagious diseases; to eat with another's mouth, sleep with another's eyes, move accordingly to another's will, obviously rushing

> toward the shipwreck of your mind and your body – what greater misery? What wealth, what luxuries, what delights can outweigh all this? Believe me, among all the world's calamities, this is the worst. And if to worldly concerns you add those of the soul, what greater doom and certainty of damnation could there be? (*Letter* 22, Jones & Rosenthal 39)

Veronica Franco in this latest passage is condemning the worldly decadence that the body and soul of a courtesan had to face, "correndo in manifesto naufragio sempre della facoltà e della vita" –obviously rushing toward the shipwreck of your mind and your body, and she wants to publicize this danger in the public way, typical of the epistolary genre. For this reason, she wants to convince the mother of preserving her daughter's virginity and giving the young girl a better option for her future: "onestamente maritare" (to marry decently). Again, Veronica Franco is here denouncing the commercialization of the female body and sexuality, "made it even more lamentable when a mother merchandises her own daughter's flesh" (Rosenthal 129). Franco's attempt to stop the mother from selling her daughter's body and sexuality seems to recall, or according to Margaret Rosenthal to explain, from a female point of view, a recent law declared by the Council of Ten in 1563. This law tried to stop mothers from prostituting their daughters with the purpose of receiving a monetary support.

> Le violationi delle povere virginelle sono state sempre et tuttavia sono giudicate per casi gravi et molto perniciosi, onde quelli che le commettono, giustamente deono esser castigati secondo la forma delle leggi nostre; ma se in genere questi sono flagitii enormi, senza dubbio sono di peggior qualità quando sono perpetrati con quelle che sono in età

> minore et immature, le quali per non haver ancora l'uso della ragione, né cognition del bene o male che se gli appresenta, non gli si può dire che consentano al peccato. (Calza 39)
>
> The violation of unfortunate young virgins have always been, and still are, considered very bad and pernicious; hence the ones who commit them must be punished according to the forms of our laws. But even though they are considered enormous crimes, they are, without of doubt, worse when they are perpetrated upon females who are under age and immature, who, not having the cognition of good and evil, cannot be condemned to the sinful deed. (My translation)

Many young girls dedicated to prostitution could not be punished; however, their mothers were to be severely penalized by the Inquisition. For this reason, Veronica Franco in her epistle not only tries to save the daughter from the dangers of the streets, but also the mother from the punishments of an existing law. In this regard, John Martin and Aldo Stella describe the public theatrical humiliation that the Roman Inquisition brought to Venice after 1565. The mother was usually placed on a platform between two columns in Saint Mark's Square with a crown of ignominy on her head and a sign, which described her specific crime. Also, if a father or a male figure was accused, he had to wear a heraldic emblem around his chest showing his guilt and later had to serve on galley ships for two years; if such a man could not perform the punishment due to a illness or a

physical impossibility, he was to be imprisoned for two years and then he had to serve on galley ships for another two years.[66]

Female virginity and its protection was one of the first concerns of Venetian patricians who found a way to also protect non-noble women (who where usually more exposed to the danger of being raped due to a lack of control in the house or the streets) by founding charitable institutions such as the Casa delle Zitelle[67] for poor and unwanted maidens. It was also for Veronica Franco who focused on the body and the body politics by inserting the body and its weight in her poems and familiar letters and fighting for women's rights. Her preoccupation with poor or impoverished women took concrete form in 1577, three years before the publication of her letters, when she wrote a *supplica* (petition) to the Venetian government to request the foundation of a home for women who, either already married or with children, were not admitted in the existing Casa delle Zitelle or the Casa delle Convertite (House for converted women). After Franco's petition and idea, the Casa del Soccorso (Emergency house) was founded in the late 1570's, although noblewomen administered it. According to Rosenthal, Franco's interest in creating the Casa del Soccorso reveals, perhaps, a hidden fear due to her own increasing need for financial assistance in those years.

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66 This kind of socio-political punishment, surveillance, and public humiliation is found in another century and context with Michele Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Also in Petrus Cornelis Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Execution and The Evolution of Repression From a Preindustrial Metropolis to The European Experience* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984).

67 See footnote n. 22.
Sherrill Cohen in "Asylums for Women in Counter-Reformation Italy" (in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Private and Public World,* ed. Sherrin Marshall, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989: 166-88) has argued that these charitable institutions promoted during the Counter-Reformation Italy had also the purpose of "enlarging women's horizons" (166).

The Casa del Soccorso, when first founded, consisted in a small rented house attached to the church of San Nicolo da Tolentino and was controlled by some noblewomen who had been previously associated with the Zitelle and the Derelitti homes. Later on, in 1591, some other houses were bought near the church of San Raffaele, which permitted more women to be accommodated. These Case del Soccorso received young women who could not marry due to a poor dowry, and gave them a safe place to be until they could find the necessary means to reenter the Venetian society. Also, they offered a home to unhappy wives with the consent of their husbands. Veronica Franco was always ready to help other women have a better life, so that their bodies were not to be subjugated to the dangers of the streets, even if it required them to live under a husband's "protection" and control. In fact, she also concludes her letter 22 by reminding her friend that she, once again, is ready to "save" the young daughter from a life of slavery: "sarò prontissima a prestarvi ogni sorta d'aiuto" – I will be very ready to lend you any type of help (my translation). She adds that it will not take much time until the daughter herself realizes the terrible truth of her situation and figures out who forced her into it. At that time, she will flee from her because: "l'avete oppressa e rovinata" –you have oppressed and ruined her (my translation). Franco concludes her familiar epistle with this last warning followed by a prayer to God to help guide her friend: "May Our Lord save you from your obvious intention to ruin and corrupt what you created from your own flesh and blood" (*Letter* 22, Jones & Rosenthal 40). Veronica Franco's recurrent proto-feminist discourse in the familiar letters reemerges in her *Terze rime* in which she reworks literary conventions to serve the concerns of many women silenced by male authority.

FRANCO'S *TERZE RIME* (OR *CAPITOLI*): STRIPPING OFF THE MALE INTERLOCUTOR

In 1575, Veronica Franco triumphed with a poetic debate against an unknown Venetian poet who used the Venetian dialect to demonize her and belittle her success as a highly educated courtesan writer. He used his poetic language in dialect to defame her with invective slurs that intended to lower Franco from *cortigiana onesta* (a higher status) to "puttana pubblica" (public whore):

Veronica, ver unica puttana
Franca, "idest" furba, fina, fiappa e frola,
E muffa e magra, e marza, e pì mariola,
Che si' tra Castel, Ghetto e la Doàna.

(Dazzi 37)

Veronica, veritably unique whore
Franca, id est [i.e.] foxy, flighty, flimsy, and flabby
Smelly, scrawny, scrimpy, and the biggest scoundrel behind,
Who lives between Castello, the Ghetto, and the Customs.

(Rosenthal 153)

This unknown Venetian poet, along with Maffio Venier,[68] and Ri[e]dolfo Vinnitelli, represent the three Patrician men who created obstacles that Franco had to confront during her years in the Serenissima's society. Franco's *Terze rime*, also called *Capitoli*,

[68] Maffio Venier (Venice 1550-86) was a member of the patrician Venier family of Venice. He was the son and grandson of two important humanists, respectively Lorenzo Venier and Domenico Venier. In 1593 he became archbishop of Corfù. He is mostly known for his literary attacks on Veronica Franco.

are characterized by twenty-five *capitoli* (compositions in tercets) – eighteen written by Veronica herself and the other seven by other authors (including Maffio Venier and the "incerto autore" /*unknown author*) to her. In her writings, Veronica Franco uses the literary style of *terza rima* (third rime) in order to evoke the important classical work *La Divina Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*), written by the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri – a technique that had been used earlier by Gaspara Stampa in her more discursive and narrative compositions.[69] However, by acquiring the peculiar characteristics of the "tenzone," the form and purpose of Veronica Franco's writings differ from Dante's style. The "tenzone" is a poetic genre, originated in the Medieval Ages by troubadours, that consists of a verbal debate between two or more interlocutors. These interlocutors touch on different themes (love, politics, literature etc.), sometimes as part of the same poetic composition. Jones and Rosenthal explain how this Renaissance poet gets to completely master the difficult style of the "tenzone" and how she incorporates it into her writings:

> Franco sharpens and foregrounds the *proposta /risposta* element of the *tenzone* in the outrageously amusing *capitoli* in which she equates her sexual prowess as a courtesan and her verbal prowess as a poet with the armed battle of a duel, a playful use of the form that is unique to her. (7)

Furthermore, Franco tries to approach her writing to the style of "tenzone" (a duel move/ counter-move between two fighters) in order to give authority (from latin "autoritas") to her literary work and also to literally defend her *persona* and other women against the attacks of male interlocutors.

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[69] See note n. 44.

The poetic form of the "tenzone" used in Franco's *Terze rime* brings to light the many literary practices used in the Venier salon (or Ca' Venier) at the end of the sixteenth century. There, the "tenzone" was presented as alternating different stanzas or as separate poems; it addressed a specific and pre-established topic, and it also served as a literary satire or poetic debate, "sometimes serving for personal invective and vituperation" (Rosenthal 160).[70] Girolamo Ruscelli, a member of the Accademia della Fama and an active participant of the Ca' Venier, explains the difficulties of the terzetto form and how the "tenzone" was reinterpreted in sixteenth-century Venetian poetic conversations and practices as a "proposta/risposta" exchange. He also identifies different methods for this exchange, such as "rispondere per le rime" (to answer by following the rhyme scheme), or "per le desinenze" (by the endings) (91). In this exchange, the second poet could answer by using the same rhyme scheme, by changing the order, or by using the same end words (the *sestina*) but had to change the order in which they were presented in the first exchange. Another way was to alternate forms by having one verse conform to the same rhyme and the other one to the same word in the "proposta" (Ruscelli 91-94).

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[70] "The poetic *tenzone*, derived mainly from the Provençal tradition, was incorporated into Italian poetic practice in the thirteenth century. Beginning with Giacomo da Lentini and Jacopo Mostacci, Italian poets elected the *tenzone* for personal poetic exchange. The first author proposed the theme and established the rhyme scheme, and the second author, in a second poem, responded in like rhyme or theme. This tradition continued with Dante and then with Petrarch" (Rosenthal 324). For a definition of "tenzone" as derived from "tenso," see W. Theodor Elwert, *Versificazione italiana: Dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Paris: Le Monnier, 1973), 133. Also, during the first half of the sixteenth century, the *capitolo* was the preferred form for academic, satiric, and comic compositions. It was inherited not only from the Provençal "tenso," but also from Petrarch's *I trionfi*, and the love lyrics of the thirteenth century's court poets. Later on, in the hand of sixteenth century Florentine male poets (like Francesco Berni, Il Lasca, G. B. Gelli, among others) the *capitolo* became the most important polemical weapon against literary pedantry (Rosenthal 178).

Many critics had formed the theory that Franco created the illusion of a poetic exchange with male interlocutors. According to them, Franco was the author of all sides of the exchanges. This view is quite intriguing, as Rosenthal recalls, because it would make Veronica Franco the only woman writer of her time to assume a male voice in writing. Unfortunately it is impossible to prove one theory over another because no manuscript of Franco's poems survived into our days. I agree with Rosenthal when she states that Franco did not construct a fictional poetic debate and that she was an active member of the debate by exchanging verses with Marco Venier (most likely the author of all the poems assigned to the *incerto autore – unknown author*) in Domenico Venier's house and salon. It is important to analyze Franco's choice of genre, the "tenzone," which was congenital for a courtesan poet who, due to her profession, was constantly called upon to defend herself from accusation. In the specific case of Veronica Franco, she was called upon many times: in the poetic debates and during the Inquisition trial when her children's tutor, Vinnitelli, accused her of heresy. Furthermore, Franco used the genre of the "tenzone" as counterfeit to subvert the Petrarchan nature of her interlocutor's praises. In fact, she is considered one of the few Renaissance women who rejected Petrarchism and its lyric structure in her writings.[71] In her *Terze rime*, Veronica Franco enters the stage, not only as a courtesan poet, but also as a solitary and independent woman. She enters the public territory of the literary debate with the intent of rhetorically defend herself and other women from oral and physical patriarchal violence, a right traditionally forbidden to other Renaissance women. In *capitolo* 2 we have the climax of her rejection

[71] The formal literary style peculiar to or imitated from Petrarch, especially the Petrarchan sonnet, characterized by a complex grammatical structure, elaborated conceits, and conventionalized diction.

of Petrarchism by redefining the Petrarchan muse as a poetic collaborator. The courtesan, according to Franco, was an intellectual collaborator rather than a sexual partner, and her innovation consists on including her body-weight:

Così dolce e gradevole divento,
quando mi trovo con persona a letto,
da cui amata e gradita mi sento,
che quel mio piacer vince ogni diletto,
sì che quel, che strettissimo parea,
nodo dell'altrui amor divien più stretto…
ond'io instrutta a questi so dar opra,
sì ben nel letto, che d'Apollo a l'arte
questa ne va d'assai spazio di sopra,
e 'l mio cantar e 'l mio scriver in carte
s'oblia da chi mi prova in quella guisa,
ch'a suoi seguaci Venere comparte.

(Jones & Rosenthal 68: vv. 154-59, 166-71)

So sweet and delicious do I become,
when I am in bed with a man
who, I sense, loves and enjoys me,
that the pleasure I bring excels all delight,
so the knot of love, however tight
it seemed before, is tied tighter still…
so that I, well taught in such matters,

know how to perform so well in bed

that this art exceeds Apollo by far,

and my singing and writing are both forgotten,

by the man who experiences me in this way,

which Venus reveals to people who serves her.

(Jones & Rosenthal 69: vv. 154-59, 166-71)

Veronica Franco's *Terze rime* represents the only text written by a woman poet in the *capitoli* and "tenzone" form during the end of the sixteenth century.[72] She starts by adopting the language of the military combat to open a counterattack. In *capitolo* 23, she calls upon a man, presumably Domenico Venier, who, according to her, knew well how to duel: "vengo a voi per consiglio a cui son note / le forme del düello e de l'onore, / per cui s'uccide il mondo e si percuote" – I now come for advice to you, / to whom the forms of duels and honor are known, / according to whom the world is stricken and slain (Rosenthal 232-33: vv. 10-12). She comes to him not only for counsel, but also for protection, giving the great affection he had for Veronica Franco. In these verses of *capitolo* 23, she sets the stage for her poetic "tenzone," viewed as a poetic debate in which words and rhymes are her weapon in the struggle for literary dominance over her accuser. She asks the interlocutor if she should have dressed herself as a female warrior

[72] Gaspara Stampa did also write in *capitoli*, but her compositions were completely different form the ones byVeronica Franco.

in an allusion to Ariosto's Bradamante and Marfisa[73] to better counterpart her adversary's literary blows. She wants to dress her body properly to be ready for a literary combat; in this case –continuing stressing on the metaphorical body in her work, her body as a courtesan is versatile and can be transformed into that of a warrior, an Amazon, who can defeat any men. In the liminal space of her writing, Veronica Franco is able to create a new strong woman, as I said earlier in this Chapter and also in Chapter One, who does not "perform" the fixed female gender role dictated by the generational patriarchal system. This new type a woman is a warrior that uses words (a typical male tool to show power and to defeat the silenced) to fight against patriarchal misogyny and its attempt to control female freedom and sexuality.

Franco's poetics of battle reaches its climax in *capitoli* 13 and 14 in which the female poetic voice calls her adversary, the *incerto autore* (unknown author) into battle; to which he responds calmly: "Non più guerra, ma pace: e gli odi, l'ire… si venga in amor doppio a convertire." – "No more war, but peace! And may the hate and rage… be transformed into twice much love." (Jones & Rosenthal 138-39: vv. 1-3).

Non più parole: ai fatti, in campo, a l'armi,

ch'io voglio, risoluta morire,

da sì grave molestia liberarmi.

Non so se 'l mio "cartel" si debba dire,

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[73] Venetian courtesans were familiar with the language of combat and the female warriors in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso.* Courtesans always kept books to show men and male satirists, who attacked them (such as Pietro Aretino), that they were cultivated women that could eventually answer to the attacks. Veronica Franco's allusions to the *Orlando furioso* are numerous throughout her *Terze rime*. Girolamo Ruscelli, a member of the Venier salon, published *Le annotationi, gli avvertimenti et le dischiarationi… sopra i luoghi difficili et importanti del Furioso* (Venice: Valgrisi, 1556) to analyze Franco's allusions to Ariosto. Also, Alberto Lavezuola notices these allusions in Le osservationi (included in his Orlando *Furioso… nuovamente adornato* (Venice: Francesco de' Franceschi Senese, 1584, p. 9).

in quanto do risposta provocata:

ma perchè in rissa de' nomi venire?

Se vuoi, da te mi chiamo disfidata;

e, se non, ti disfido; o in ogni via

la prendo, ed ogni occasion m'è grata.

(Jones & Rosenthal 132: vv. 1-9)

No more words! To deeds, to the battlefield, to arms!

For, resolved to die, I want to free myself

from such merciless mistreatment.

Should I call this a challenge? I do not know,

since I am responding to a provocation;

but why should we duel over words?

If you like, I will say that you've challenged me;

If not, I challenge you; I'll take any route,

and any opportunity suits me equally well.

(Jones & Rosenthal 133: vv. 1-9)

Franco is determined to bring her poetic opponent into the language battlefield and, with the strength of her body, put an end to their feud with her final victory. According to Rosenthal, in one of her verses, she is reproducing the action of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, when Ruggiero yearns to die by his lover Bradamante's hand. [74] However, she

[74] "Pensa talor di fingersi men forte / e porger nudo alla donzella il fianco; / che non fu mai la più beata morte / che se per man di lei venisse manco" [At times he decides to pretend that he is less strong and to offer the lady his flank, for there could never be more blissful death than that inflicted by her hand] (Rosenthal 190).

subverts Ariosto's scene and concept by adding her courtesan erotic desire into her verses:

Per soverchiar la tua sì indegna offesa
ti verrei sopra, e nel contrasto ardita,
scaldandoti ancor tu ne la difesa,
teco morrei d'egual colpo ferita.

(Jones & Rosenthal 136: vv. 82-85)

To take revenge for your unfair attack,
I'd fall upon you, and in daring combat,
as you too caught fire defending yourself,
I would die with you, felled by the same blow.

(Jones & Rosenthal 137: vv. 82-85)

The female poetic voice wants to die with her lover/opponent in a battle in which she has the complete sexual authority over her victim; the verse "I'd fall upon you…" reveals a man who is silenced by her climbing on top of him.

In *capitolo* 16, Franco's battle starts switching from the erotic dueling influenced by epic romances to a more aggressive battle. Here, the battle becomes verbal and the language becomes her winning weapon. Also, the personalized "io," the I of the poetic voice, present in her other *capitoli*, in *capitolo* 16 becomes a collective "noi" ("we"), referred to women as a group. For Veronica Franco, *capitolo* 16 becomes a revenge and a defense of the woman kind which starts with a sarcastic statement: "D'ardito cavaglier non è prodezza / (concedami che 'l vero a questa volta / io possa dir, la vostra gentilezza…" – "It is not a brave knight's gallant deed / (if, gentle sir, you permit me /

this time to declare the truth)…" (Jones & Rosenthal 160-61: vv. 1-3). Here, Franco draws from the Aristotelian dogma about women's physical and moral inferiority to build her verbal defense. She poses in front of other women as a pioneer female leader, who incites them to stand up and fight against men and their patriarchal social structure that pictured women as inferior creatures. She is determined to show women, who "Di ciò non se ne son… accorte" (did not realize it yet), that they can stand up for their rights and that they have the same, equal, possibilities as men, both in the battlefield and in society.

Quando armate ed esperte ancor siam noi,
render buon conto a ciascun uom potemo,
che mani e piedi e core avem qual voi;
e, se ben molli e delicate semo,
ancor tal uom, ch'è delicate, è forte;
e tal, ruvido ed aspro, è d'ardir scemo.
Di ciò non se ne sono le donne accorte,
che se si risolvessero di farlo,
con voi pugnar porìan fino alla morte.
E per farvi veder che 'l vero parlo,
tra tante donne incominciar voglio io,
porgendo essempio a lor di seguitarlo.
A voi, che contra tutte sète rio,
con qual'armi volete in man mi volgo,
con speme d'atterrarvi e con desio;
e le donne a defender tutte tolgo

contra di voi, che di lor sète schivo,

sì ch'a ragion io sola non mi dolgo.

(Jones & Rosenthal 162,164: vv. 64-81)

When we women, too, have weapons and training,

we will be able to prove to all men

that we have hands and feet and hearts like yours;

and though we may be tender and delicate,

some men who are delicate also are strong,

and some, though coarse and rough, are cowards.

Women so far haven't seen this is true;

for if they'd ever resolved to do it,

they'd have been able to fight you to death.

And to prove to you that I speak the truth,

among so many women I will act first,

setting an example for them to follow.

On you, who are so savage to us all,

I turn, with whatever weapon you choose,

with the hope and will to throw you to the ground.

And I undertake to defend all women

against you, who despise them so

that rightly I'm not alone to protest.

(Jones & Rosenthal 163,165: vv. 64-81)

Franco is convinced that women have not yet seen the truth. They can be as strong as men both on paper and with physical deeds. She wants to be the first one to carry the example for others who did not realize their qualities yet. She also tells her male interlocutor, the *incerto autore*, to choose any kind of weapon he wants because, in any circumstance, she will be able to defeat him to the ground, as an example for women to follow. Furthermore, Franco concludes the *capitolo* 16 with an allusion to her linguistic expertise in a public "tenzone." The sword becomes the language and Veronica Franco the master of any poetic idiom or language her adversary should propose.

La spade, che 'n man vostra rode e fora,
de la lingua volgar veneziana,
s'a voi piace d'usar, piace a me ancora:
e, se volete entrar ne la toscana,
scegliete voi la seria o la burlesca,
ché l'una e l'altra è a me facile e piana.

(Jones & Rosenthal 166: vv. 112-17)

The sword that strikes and stabs in your hand –
the common language spoken in Venice –
if that's what you want to use, then so do I;
and if you want to enter into the Tuscan,
I leave you the choice of high or comic strain,
for one's as easy and clear for me as the other.

(Jones & Rosenthal 167: vv. 112-17)

By concluding the *capitolo* 16 with a discourse on language, Veronica Franco closes the poetic "tenzone" and the battle of mistaken identities. The *capitoli* represents a poetic game of deformed and mistaken identities between Veronica Franco, Marco, and Maffio Venier. One of the two cousins, at some point during the "tenzone," became the *incerto autore* (unknown author), the one that attacked and demonized Veronica Franco in her last years and during her inquisition trial.[75] In her debate/tenzone with the *incerto autore*, Franco appears as a critic both for literary and social discourse, while the *incerto autore* slowly loses his masculinity, identity and literary authority.

> She rejects an idolatrous poetic discourse that insists on exalting the woman as a disembodied object of male praise, and she also deploys a public, polemical mode commonly denied [to] women to expose her satirical detractor and to reverse his misogynistic portrait of the courtesan. (Rosenthal 197)

Veronica Franco survived both the Inquisition and the poetic verbal "tenzone" with the *incerto autore* by proving her literary skills in the court and on paper.

Veronica Franco was considered one of the most famous courtesans of Venice, not only for her socio-political involvement in the Serenissima's affairs, but also for her "public tongue" and her exquisite rhetoric, negated to the "normalized" noblewomen of her time. As I have mentioned before, the majority of women during the Italian Renaissance were forced to domestic lives and services: "…married aristocratic women were restricted to the confines of the family structure and were allowed to participate in

[75] The 8th of October of 1580, Veronica Franco was called by the Inquisition for a trial to counter anonymous charges of performing heretical incantations in her house near San Giovanni Novo. "In 1580, as a result of increased religious supervision after the Council of Trent, the Inquisition brought charges against her for practicing magic. During the trial, she confessed to having given birth six times, but managed to defend herself and was absolved" (Stortoni & Lillie 169).

the workings of public society only from the safe distance of their palazzo windows" (Rosenthal, 234). Franco's power of rhetoric and constant physical and bodily presence in the patrician environments of the Serenissima, made her appear as a threat to the patriarchal socio-political structure that wanted her to adhere to certain female canon, which she kept evading. She was a different type of woman, not a typical weak courtesan, but a strong one with a body that could give pleasure to men and, at the same time, a powerful mind that could swallow them. She became a monstrous creature that, with the power of her words, was able to devour a man and strip him from his own identity, masculinity, and authority. In his travel diaries, Thomas Coryat, declared that one had to be aware of the courtesan's many seductive musical and rhetorical powers:

> Moreover shee will endevour to enchaunt thee partly with her melodious notes that shee warbles out upon her lute, which shee fingers with as laudable a stroake as many men that are excellent professors in the noble science of Musicke; and partly with that heart-tempting harmony of her voice. Also thou wilt finde the Venetian Cortezan (if she be a selected woman indeede) a good Rhetorician, and a most elegant discourser, so that if shee cannot move thee with all these foresaid delights, shee will assay constancy with her Rhetoricall tongue. ("City Women" 304)

Veronica Franco's "Rhetorical tongue" became her strongest weapon against the patriarchal power, which was ruling the Venetian Renaissance and its socio-political environment. Franco's literary tongue did free her from the Inquisition's accusations and dominated the poetic *tenzone* against the *incerto autore* (unknown author). Veronica

Franco, as the mythological figure of the siren,[76] enchanted and seduced the incautious man with her literary and poetical chant. She attracted him to her pleasurable body and sweet mouth in order to devour his entire male *persona*. Maffio Venier through his *proposta/risposta* with Franco slowly lost his authorial and literary identity: he became the *incerto autore* (unknown author). He followed the dangerous siren's sweet tongue into her liminal space and ended up devoured by her monstrous mouth. Veronica Franco with her "Rhetorical tongue" was able to embrace Maffio Venier, drag him into her liminal space, and destabilize him until he was completely stripped from his male literary and authorial identity. Maffio Venier, by interacting with Veronica Franco in her *liminality*[77]*,* lost his literary *persona.* In the literary exchange with Franco, he was unable to recognize the expected female gender role dictated by the patriarchal system and, for this reason, got destabilized by the new liminal gender with which he was exchanging verses. On the other hand, Veronica Franco, in her liminal space, was able to rise from her own words, gain strength, strip Maffio Venier from his gender identity, and also defeat the Inquisition and its accusations.

Veronica Franco survived the Inquisition with the presence of Domenico Venier, with the Inquisitor's predisposition, and, most of all, with the power of her own words.

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[76] In Greek mythology, the Siren was a creature half bird and half woman who lured sailors to death by the sweetness of her songs. According to Homer there were two Sirens on an island in the western sea between Aeaea and the rocks of Shylla. Later the number was increased to three, and they were located on the west coast of Italy near Naples. They were said to be the daughters of the sea god Phorcys or of the river god Achelous by one of the Muses. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* – Britannica.com)

[77] I will be using Bhabha's term in a non post-colonial sense; However, I will argue that the "third space" or liminal space between a patriarchal social order and a matriarchal one, in which Veronica Franco and Sor Juana found themselves thinking and writing, allowed them to go beyond the rigidity of gender binaries and explore different venues of freedom.
Refer to Chapter One.

However, her reputation was inevitably damaged and these difficult years created a downfall spiral. She was impoverished by the plague of 1575-77, in which she lost a lot of her valuable possessions due to various thefts. Moreover, after her faithful friend, Domenico Venier, died in 1582, she moved to a section of Venice in which many destitute prostitutes ended their lives. Veronica Franco died in 1591 at the age of forty-five in her house. It ended a life that included a decade of sumptuous wealth with its dangers, difficulties, and losses, while setting a path of female power and strength for "them [other and future women] to follow" (Franco 15).[78]

[78] See the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter.

Anonimous painting of young Juana Inés de Asbaje, México, 1666 (associated to J. Sanchez, according to signature on the right).

Portrait of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by Miguel Cabrera (c. 1750). Oil on canvas (Museo Nacional de Historia, Castillo de Chapultepec, Mexico)

CHAPTER THREE

I Dream *Ergo Sum*: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and her androgynous-self

Yo no entiendo de esas cosas;
sólo sé que aquí me vine
porque, si es que soy mujer,
ninguno lo verifique…
Con que a mí no es bien mirado
que como a mujer me miren,
pues no soy mujer que a alguno
de mujer pueda servirle;
y sólo sé que mi cuerpo,
sin que a uno u otro se incline,
es neutro, o abstracto, cuanto
sólo el Alma deposite.
("Respondiendo a un caballero de Perú" -- Sor Juana)

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz… Sor Juana… How can we even start talking about a woman whose work and identity has been analyzed, compared, and quoted in so many books, articles, lectures, modern art, etc. The image of Sor Juana keeps growing all around the world, from the Americas to Europe, and many scholars keep studying her works from different perspectives, from the more traditional way to the new gender/queer theory, passing through the old and the new waves of feminism. According to Electa Arenal, "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's keen intelligence and her consummate ability to elaborate texts, employing a wide variety of discursive modalities, allowed her to revise

discourse itself in order to give women full voice" (*Crossing Boundaries* 173). Therefore, having an overview of her life and works chronologically may help us better understand the evolution and motivations of this strong and complex woman and baroque artist.

Sor Juana was a woman out of the ordinary, exceptionally beautiful, and poor –in the words of Octavio Paz:

> She was the favorite of the Vicereine and lived at court, courted by many; she was loved and perchance she loved. Abruptly she gives up worldly life and enters a convent… she converts her cell into a study filled with books, works of art, and scientific instruments, and transforms the convent locutory into a literary and intellectual salon. (Paz 1)

She was born Juana Ramírez de Asbaje from a family of small landowners of modest means. The accurate circumstances of Sor Juana's birth are still somewhat obscure and mysterious. She was born at the *hacienda* San Miguel of Nepantla under the volcano Popocatépetl on either December 2, 1648, or November 12, 1651 –this area today is considered part of Mexico City –like she says in one of her poems: "I was born where solar rays / stared down at me from overhead, / not squint-eyed, as in the other climes" (Paz 64). According to the Jesuit Father Diego Calleja, the first person writing her biography and Sor Juana's contemporary, she was born on November 12th, 1651; however no "baptismal entry has been found recording her name and that of her parents" (Paz 65). Apparently, in those days the names of the parents of illegitimate children were not entered in the church registry. Later scholars found a certificate of baptism in the parish of Chimalhuacán –the jurisdiction to which Nepantla belonged –and confirmed that Sor Juana was born on December 2nd, 1648. The baptism record stated "Inés,

daughter of the Church; the godparents were Miguel Ramírez and Beatriz Ramírez" (Paz 65). As Octavio Paz recalls, Miguel and Beatriz Ramírez were the brother and sister of Sor Juana's mother, Isabel; therefore it is almost certain that her correct date of birth was the 1648 one and not the one long perpetuated by Father Calleja. Sor Juana was an illegitimate child of a "criolla"[79] mother, Isabel Ramírez, who took control over the hacienda in Nepantla and kept the family and her other children together. Many scholars believed that Sor Juana's illegitimacy was the center of her existential dilemma, which is present in several of her works, and her possible reason for becoming a nun. However, in the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*The Answer*) Sor Juana states that she decided to enter the convent due to her strong aversion towards marriage, yet wanting to choose the most honorable avenue towards salvation.

> 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 materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación; (*Poems* 14,16)
>
> And so I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions (I refer to superficial, and not fundamental, regards) most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life the least unsuitable and the most honorable I could elect if I were to insure my salvation. (*Poems* 15,17)

[79] During the years of discovery, conquest, and colonization of the New World, the word "criollo" was used to identify people who were born in the new land and whose parents were Spaniards, of pure Spanish descent.

In Sor Juana's time, women of some means[80] were restricted in three roles that were dominated by patriarchy and its social norms: the domestic (the normalized one), the courtly, and the monastic. In the privacy of the house, women were passive and their duty was to bear children and care for their husbands; in the extravagant halls of the court, women were objects of male-admiration and adoration; finally, in the convent, religious women were asked to be silent and chaste and conduct a contemplative life. Sor Juana entered the convent probably not only for these reasons but also in search of a room of her own. Among the four walls of the convent, Sor Juana was able to be part of a new matriarchal world and adhere to its rules; as I explain in Chapter One, different matriarchal sub-societies started at the margins of the generational patriarchal social order, created and supported by the marginalized women (religious women, prostitutes/courtesans, *beatas*,[81] mystics etc.). Sor Juana was able, through her writing, to push herself to the limit of her matriarchal world and create a liminal space of freedom. In this liminal "room of her own," Sor Juana stopped performing the fixed binary gender roles imposed by the outside patriarchal society (the Madonna and the Medusa/Eve) and generated a new in-between gender which allowed her to write, resist, escape, and eventually destabilize the patriarchal gender force that marginalized and even destroyed

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[80] With the exception of widows who could be somehow independent and work in the husband's business. The women without means were forced to conduct a life of work, be it within the confines of the family, convent, or on their own.

[81] During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the *beatas* were a different type of women, "mujeres piadosas," who did not want to marry or enter a convent. The *beatas* lived alone in communities (beaterios) and had a lot of power and prestige among their people because of their believed holiness. According to Elizabeth Perry, "Religion empowered another group of women in Seville… they had taken a vow of chastity and dedicated their lives to serving God. Frequently they wore religious habits, but they rarely followed the rule of any religious order" (*Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* 97).

women that did not fall into the preferred *normalized*[82] category. The convent represented for her a perfect androgynous place in which she could expand her mind and devote to her inclination without being stopped by the burden of her female body.[83] "A wealthy benefactor had endowed her with enough money to carry on a luxurious existence," she had many possessions, among them, many indigenous musical and scientific instruments, folk art and other paraphernalia. She chose the convent to be in the company of her marvelous possessions and in the precious silence of her books: "de no querer ocupación obligatoria que embarazase la libertad de mi studio, ni rumor de comunidad que impidiese el sosegado silencio de mis libros" – "and wishing to have no obligatory occupation that would inhibit the freedom of my studies, nor the sound of a community that would intrude upon the peaceful silence of my books" (*Poems* 16, 17).

We do not know very much about Sor Juana's father, Pedro Manuel de Asbaje y Vargas Machuca. He was a Basque and mostly absent from his daughter's life. He is not mentioned in the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, in which Sor Juana describes her family dynamics. According to Octavio Paz, "For the study of Sor Juana's life we must rely on two basics texts: her letter to the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz... and the brief biography written by the Jesuit priest Diego Calleja" (64). Also, Paz raises a couple of questions about Sor Juana's father and his frequent absence from his children's life –and eventually from Sor Juana's writings. There were two baptismal records of 1666 in the parish of Chimalhuacán that were signed by a friar F. (or H.) de Asvaje. "Who is F

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[82] See note n.18 in Chapter One.

[83] The burden of the body was already a common place among literary women due to the influence of Saint Theresa's "Vivo sin vivir en mí." However for Saint Theresa the struggle represented the tension between the female body and soul, for Sor Juana is between the female body and the intellect. Refer to Chapter One for a longer explanation.

de Asvaje? A relative of Pedro Manuel de Asbaje? Could that friar be the father of Juana Inés and her two older sisters?" (Paz 65). Theoretically, this supposition cannot be proven and could also seem unfounded, but it is not completely absurd. During that century –as many records from the Inquisition attest –relations between priests and single or married women were not rare.

Sor Juana rarely mentions her father's name and, apparently, she did not see him from the time she was a little girl. She had no connection with her father's relatives either and she never spoke of them. However, she always considered herself a "legitimate daughter" and defended her legitimacy in many verses. She must have been aware of the gossip surrounding her origins. Octavio Paz presents an epigram,[84] in which she replies to an "insolent" critic. This epigram reveals that Sor Juana was surrounded by rumors and yet, she was sensitive to them:

El de no ser de padre honrado,
fuera defecto, a mi ver,
si como recibí el ser
de él, se lo hubiera yo dado.
Más piedosa fue tu Madre,
que hizo que a muchos sucedas:
para que, entre tantos, puedas
tomar el que más te cuadre.

(Scott 88)

Not to be born of an honorable father
would be a blemish, I must own,

[84] The word epigram originated from the Greek *epigramma,* which means "inscription" or "to inscribe." An epigram is a rhetorical device that is memorable, brief, interesting, and full of satirical statements. Epigrams are very common in poetry, but we also find them in prose, fiction, film, politics, and everyday speech; they serve the same purpose of maxims and proverbs and they do not require a fixed writing rule.

if receiving my being from no other
I had not known it was his alone.
Far more generous was your mother
when she arranged you ancestry
offering many a likely father
among whom to choose your pedigree.

(Paz 66)

Octavio Paz explains the epigraph and comments on the word "honorable;" he believes that this word is connected to Asbaje's origins: "Was Asbaje not "honorable" because he was a plebeian or because he had committed some crime or misdeed?" (66). However, in my opinion, the adjective "honorable," in the words of Sor Juana, refers to the courage that her father did not have in recognizing his children and, also, the honor that he (probably) took violently from her mother, Isabel Ramirez. The female body used to represent not only the riches, but also the social status of the man who possesed it. "Sus cuerpos se asocian con la riqueza y el estatus y su 'conquista'… las mujeres se convierten en ese 'otro' en el cual el grupo masculino dominante proyecta sus ansias de conquista y autoridad" (Nieves Romero-Díaz 21). Moreover, in Jane Caputi's article "Overkill: Why Excess and Conflict are Both Sexy and Sacred," we can observe that also in modern pop culture, the female image is associated with an object of male desires and pleasures:

> Nonetheless, it is easy to forget these influences, for throughout our popular culture, women are commonly represented as equivalent to, or indistinguishable from, objects –motorcycles, cars, tables, bottles of beer, something for men to own, drive, consume, and ultimately discard. With women as the paradigmatic symbolic object of possession, possession itself takes on a sexual charge. (281)

In the past and also in the present socio-patriarchal structure, a man is permitted to posses a woman as an object of honor, of riches, of patriarchal continuity, and of pleasure, as Rubin and Irigaray have explained in their analysis of the "exchange of women" in the patriarchal society. In their argument, Rubin uses Levi-Strauss, Freud, and some Marx, while Irigaray uses Marx, to argue that Western patriarchy, not only sees the woman as an object, but also treats women as currency through which men generate relations among themselves.

> If it is the women who are being transacted, then it is the man who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it… But it does imply a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. (Rubin 174)

In the case of Isabel, Sor Juana's mother, the captain only took her for pleasure and destroyed her paternal honor by not marrying her and not recognizing his own children. Therefore, Isabel had no other choice than to return to her parental home in the Hacienda of Panoayán, in which Juana Inés lived during her childhood.

There is no doubt that Sor Juana was a brilliant and precocious young girl, who started finding refuge and fulfillment in the library of her maternal grandfather, Pedro Ramirez, and, at the age of eight, wrote her first poem about the Eucharist for a religious festival. From the beginning, her intellectual curiosity became a passion and she tried with all her strength to achieve it more and more throughout her life. As she explains in the *Respuesta* (*The Answer*) she did not eat cheese because she had been told it made one slow-witted, and her "desire for learning was stronger than the desire for eating" (*Poems*

15). Later on she asked her mother to send her to the university dressed like a man. After her mother's obvious refusal, she consoled herself by reading and studying in her grandfather's library. She also cut off her hair to make sure that by the time it grew back she would have completed her learning of Latin grammar:

> Empecé a deprender gramática… yo me cortaba de él [el pelo] cuatros o seis dedos, midiendo hasta donde 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… que no me parecía razón que estuviese vestida de cabellos cabeza que estaba tan desnuda de noticias, que era más apetecible adorno. (*Poems* 14)
>
> I began to study Latin grammar… I cut off mine to the breadth of some four to six fingers, measuring the place it had reached, and supposing upon myself the condition that if by the time it had again grown to that length I had not learned such and such a thing I had set for myself… for there seemed to me no cause for a head to be adorned with hair and naked of learning –which was the most desirable embellishment. (*Poems* 15)

Octavio Paz (Mexico City, 1914 – 1998), who is considered the Mexican leading poet, essayist, and cultural critic, dedicated part of his life to researching and writing about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. In his *Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith*, Paz gives a mastery portrayal of Sor Juana's life by placing it in its historical setting: the autocratic,

theocratic, and male-dominated society of New Spain.[85] Throughout my analysis I will be referring to Paz's work as an important historical and biographical background on Sor Juana's life, culture, and writings. According to Paz, "Sor Juana's fragmentary recollections of her childhood have been one of the sources of the hypothesis of her masculinity" (73). However, young Juana was living in a society ruled by patriarchal rules that paralyzed women and placed them in a couple of different roles (mothers, courtesans/prostitutes, or nuns); for this reason, Sor Juana's supposed masculinity was an attempt to assert herself by means of androgyny, which is not only a life strategy, but a strategy within her writing. Also, women were not taught to read nor write –with the exception of a few, upper-class women and religious women who had access to writing and a limited selection of readings.[86] For this reason, I believe that Sor Juana realized at her young age that a woman was not able to have complete access to literacy (theology, astronomy, literature, geography, science etc.) unless she passed for a man or became one. She lived in her grandparents' hacienda, surrounded by a multiplicity of books belonging to her grandfather; therefore it is not hard to believe that, during her studying hours, she came in contact with some historical or fictional women who dressed like men

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[85] Octavio Paz is the leading biographical study of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz that I will be using in my dissertation as a chronological base. However, I will be including all the other important studies by well-known *sorjuamistas* such as Stephanie Merrim, Jacqueline Cruz and Sarah Poot-Herrera.

[86] Christine de Pizan, Isotta Nogarola, Hildegard Von Biden etc. During the years, many women tried to find a way to self-authorization in a sociological and literary patriarchal structure. Whether they were religiously inspired or not, they were constantly confronted by the Bible, which was used for centuries by patriarchal authorities to define the proper role(s) for women in society and to justify their subordination. Therefore, during the Middle Ages on, a feminist Bible criticism developed through the years and it can be seen as an initial response to the constrains and limitations imposed upon women's intellectual development based upon religious gender definitions (Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* 138)

in order to pursue their dream or regain their honor, such as Catalina de Erauso, known as la Monja Alférez (1592-1650) and Doña Leonor in *Valor, agravio y mujer* (1653) by Ana Caro.[87] However, I would add to Paz's opinion and state that Sor Juana not only realized that she needed to assimilate to a man in order to escape the patriarchal gender roles and be able to access knowledge, but, with time and the right resources (the four walls of a convent) she also created a new-gendered woman, an androgynous woman who merged from the liminal space between her matriarchal sub-society and the outside patriarchal social order. Sor Juana's androgynous self allowed her to beat the ruling patriarchal social order that tried to marginalize her, explore knowledge, and eventually become a new woman with a great mind and a "male-like" literary freedom.

SOR JUANA'S FIRST VERSES OF LOVE TO LAURA, THE VICEREINE LEONOR CARRETO

After her grandfather's death in 1656, Sor Juana moved from her birthplace, the *hacienda* Panoayán in Nepantla, to Mexico City in which she lived a few years with her maternal aunt, Doña Maria Ramírez and her husband Juan de Mata. Afterwards, she became the protégé of the Marquise of Mancera, Leonor Carreto –the "Laura" of her first

[87] Catalina de Erauso was a Basque nun who decided to escape the convent, dressed like a man, and become a fugitive to the New Spain, the New World. She narrates her life as a lieutenant in the new continent in her biography, in a time in which it was strictly prohibited to women to dress like men. Almost at the end of her life, Catalina de Erauso was arrested and is brought back to Spain. In Rome she received the forgiveness of Pope Urban VIII and she finally returned to Cuetlaxtla (near Orizaba), New Spain and died in 1650.

Leonor de Ribera is the protagonist of the fictional work *Valor, agravio y mujer* written by Ana Caro in 1653. Leonor is a high-class woman, dishonored and abandoned by Don Juan de Cordoba. She finally decides to dress like a man, Don Leonardo, and find Don Juan to brutally kill him and restore her lost honor –eventually she will find Don Juan and force him to repent and apology to her for his behavior.
In fact the "mujer varonil," or woman dressed as a man that reflects on gender roles and identity, is a common character in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish *Comedia*.

poems, in an allusion to Petrarch and the Platonic sentiment – wife of the New Spain's Viceroy.

Mueran contigo, Laura, pues moriste,
los afectos que en vano te desean,
los ojos a quien privas de que vean
hermosa luz que un tiempo concediste.

Muera mi lira infausta en que influiste
ecos, que lamentables te vocean,
y hasta estos rasgos mal formados sean
lágrimas negras de mi pluma triste.

Muévase a compasión la misma Muerte
que, precisa, no pudo perdonarte;
y lamente el Amor su amarga suerte,

pues si antes, ambicioso de gozarte,
deseó tener ojos para verte,
ya le sirvieran solo de llorarte.

(Leiva 33)

Because you have died, Laura, let affections
die too that yearn, desiring you in vain,
along with these eyes you deprive of the sight
of the beautiful light you once bestowed.

And let my forlorn lyre die, where you inspired
echoes that mournfully cry out for you,
and let even these ill-favored strokes become
the black tears of my melancholy pen.

Then let Death herself be moved to take pity,
who was compelled and could not pardon you;
and let Love lament his own bitter fate,

for if at one time, he longed to enjoy you
and wished to have eyes so that he could see you,
now they will serve him only to weep for you.

(*Selected Works* 41)

Sor Juana writes this sonnet in honor of her beloved Marquise of Macera who had passed away in Spain. The poetic voice reproduces the typical Petrarchan male voice overwhelmed by sentiments of past love for this woman, Laura, who used to inspire the "lira" (forlorn) and the verses of love. The poetic voice cries the presence of Laura (Leonor Carreto) who used to enamor anyone that saw her and who filled the space with love and light. In the second stanza, Sor Juana speaks about her own writing, influenced by Laura and her presence; writing that now is suddenly transformed into "black tears of my melancholy pen." Finally, the poetic voice concludes the sonnet by invoking Death and Love: the former to take pity on what it did (take Laura away from the living world) and the latter to "lament his own bitter fate" (to not be able to lay its eyes on Laura and enjoy her beauty one more time).

Leonor, just like Sor Juana, was not an ordinary person and was extremely fond of literature. Her husband felt the same fascination and agreed to Sor Juana's acceptance to the court as the lady-in-waiting of the Marchioness, his wife. Octavio Paz describes her

as “clever, vivacious, haughty, and perhaps a bit saucy” (89). In Sor Juana’s first biography, Father Calleja recalls the fact that, years later, the Marquis of Mancera never forgot Sor Juana and the day in which she stood in front of many honorable men to prove her knowledge.

> … he wanted to ascertain the truth and to learn whether such amazing wisdom was innate or acquired… and so he gathered together one day in his palace all the men of letters in the university and the city of Mexico. They numbered some forty, of varied professions, such as theologians, scripturists, philosophers, mathematicians, historians, poets, humanists, and not a few of those we like facetiously to call “parlor wits,” those who although not having as the purpose of their studies a university appointment, nevertheless, with their native wit and general erudition, are wont, and not in vain, to judge soundly on all things… So on the appointed day they gathered for this curious and remarkable competition, and the honorable Marquis testifies that the human mind cannot conceive what he witnessed, for he says that “in the manner that a royal galleon” – here I transcribe His Excellency’s words – “might fend off the attacks of a few canoes, so did Juana extricate herself from the questions, arguments, and objections, these many men, each in his specialty, directed to her.” What study, what understanding, what mental prowess, and what memory must be necessary for this! (Paz 98)

At the age of nineteen, just when her learning and wit had captured the admiration of the cultured and of the court, accompanied by her beauty and cleverness, Sor Juana

entered, as a novice, the convent of San José de las Carmelitas Descalzas (the Discalced Carmelites). However, she left after a brief time due to the severity of the order, and returned for a moment to the mundane life. “Her Catholic biographers maintain that she left for reasons of health, but there is not a single text or document to prove this supposition, except for one rather vague allusion by Father Oviedo, Nuñez de Miranda’s biographer” (Paz 99). Probably, Sor Juana was unable to bear the harshness of the Carmelitas Descalzas and, a year and a half later, on the twenty-forth of February of 1669, she took her vows in a different convent and order: the convent of San Jerónimo, known for the mildness of its discipline.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the population of Mexico numbered twenty thousand Spanish and criollos and “some eighty thousand Indians, mestizos, and mulattos” (Paz 117). Consequently, the convent population actively reflected the complexity of the Mexican colonial society with its socio-political divisions. Sor Juana contributed to the complexity of her convent population by being a criollo woman amid other women of different social status. The convent’s diversity corresponded to the multiplicity of hierarchies and jurisdictions represented by the different communities in New Spain. “There were convents for Spanish women and for criollo women, a convent exclusively for the descendants of the conquistadores, and another, Corpus Christi, for Indian noblewomen” (Paz 118). However, it was not easy at that time to enter a convent; every girl who wanted to pursue a cloistered life needed to have some specific requirements in hand: purity of blood/lineage, dowry, and the ability to pay off the ceremony of profession expenses. That is why, according to Octavio Paz, Sor Juana declared “at the time she took her vows that she was the legitimate daughter of Pedro de

Asbaje and Isabel Ramírez" (118). Inside the convent there was a hierarchical structure that organized the different types of nuns according to their class status, mystical characteristics, degrees of devotion, and administrative responsibilities. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau explain how "Maintenance of family status and wealth made it advantageous to place children in the Church; some cloisters even had waiting lists" (3). In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, both in Spain and in its colonies, convents became "repositories for daughters of the nobility and wealthy urban classes, prison for the 'dishonored' or 'disobedient,' and sanctuaries for the studious, who had little access to higher education" (Arenal, Schlau 3).

> Of course, the hierarchical social structure of the secular sphere was mirrored in religion. In the New World, Black, *mulata* (mixed Black and European blood), Indian, and *mestiza* (mixed Indian and European blood) women could only be servant or slaves… For women of a certain rank the opportunity to study and learn was one of the important advantages of convent life. (Arenal, Schlau 4)

The convent of San Jerónimo offered music, dance, and theatre classes in which Sor Juana participated by writing lyrics. Although nuns were expected to follow a strict schedule of meals and prayers, they participated in many activities, such as poetry tournaments, musical concerts, theatrical events, masquerades, and other events. On some occasions, they also received outside visitors who would enjoy the artistic representations from restricted areas of the convent; areas in which the outsiders were permitted inside the convent in order to attend the nuns' artistic performances. Although the convent rules were based on self-denial and sacrifice, many nuns conducted quite a luxurious life with

slaves and servant girls. They also wore jewelry, dressed finely, enjoyed expensive furniture, and collected valuable ornaments. Moreover, in these convents, various possessions "belonged to the women and to God. Women organized and ran their homes for themselves, developing skills in management of landed property, construction, financing, and the law" (Arenal, Schlau 3). The cloister, which was often represented as a prison or a necessary refuge, was a place in which women could support each other and develop enough independence, and so it was for Sor Juana. The convent, just like the patrician house for Veronica Franco, was a little mini-society ruled by women and their matriarchal laws. Although these matriarchal societies were created and operated at the edges of a bigger patriarchal society, they followed their own rules created by women and for women. Therefore, Sor Juana felt more confortable and had more freedom inside the convent, than in her previous life at court. During her young years, she realized that a life inside the court would have controlled her "negra inclinación" (dark inclination) for books and knowledge, would have forced her into an unwanted marriage, and would have turned her into a *normalized* married and obedient woman, completely subjugated to patriarchal gender roles. However, young Sor Juana already knew that marriage life was not for her and that her love for books and knowledge was stronger, so she found a way to escape the patriarchal binary-gender-role imprisonment and free her genderless soul towards the light of knowledge.

In the convent of San Jerónimo, Sor Juana experienced a very comfortable life: her cell was a large apartment with sitting room and kitchen space. She dedicated considerable room space to books (according to Octavio Paz, by the end of her life, she had collected a library of four thousand books), musical instruments, maps, and other

scientific and research materials. Although Sor Juana's life was somehow restricted and confined, she found in the convent what Virginia Woolf would later call, "a room of one's own."[88] According to Woolf, English middle class women had an enormous genius, just like their male companions, but they could not express it due to their "anatomy" and social circumstances. In order to be a successful female writer, a woman needed five hundred Pounds (money) and a "room of one's own," a private space in which she could concentrate (away from domestic work and the noise of children) and liberate her literary creativity. Middle class women did not have this opportunity, not because of their anatomy, but rather due to their socio-economic position based on a patriarchal canon. However, in a different time (almost three hundred years before) and space, a Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, found a room of her own to nourish her literary genius. Her life was surrounded by silence and tranquility in which she could dedicate herself to writing at her own leisure. "She has other convenience as well, including part-time domestic help –a servant to wash, cook, and attend to her earthly needs" (*Poems* xxxvi). Despite her freedom to collect, Sor Juana, like other nuns, was forbidden to leave the convent's walls; however, this physical imprisonment did not stop, what she named, her *negra inclinación* ("dark inclination," obscure desire) and which became the light of her impressive literary production. A commission that she received in 1680 enlightened her convent status and literary influence at that time: she had to write a poem celebrating a

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[88] "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenians slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own" (*A Room of One's Own* 106-107). Virginia Woolf, just like Sor Juana three hundred years earlier, is looking for a kind of writing that is androgynous. She uses Coleridge's concept of the androgynous mind to explain how the intellect should not have gender and how women, English middle class women could also reach their literary and artistic freedom with little money (£500) and a "room of one's own."

triumphal cathedral arch to honor the new Viceroy and Vicereine of La Laguna. At this point I will concentrate on a few of Sor Juana's works (The *Allegorical Neptune*, her love poems, the "Answer To A Gentleman From Perú," *First Dream*, and the "Answer To Sor Filotea de la Cruz.") to demonstrate the way she created a particular style that makes use of her supposed androgyny.

THE *ALLEGORICAL NEPTUNE* (1680)

As Georgina Sabat de Rivers reminds us, "Tradicionalmente el arco era el punto de encuentro y partida de las autoridades civiles y eclesiásticas. El de la ciudad se erigió, según norma ya establecida en la plaza de Santo Domingo" ("Traditionally the arch was the meeting point of departure of civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The one [arch] of the city was erected, according to an established norm, on San Domingo's square") [my translation] (247). Therefore, Sor Juana composed the *Allegorical Neptune* as a dedication to the structure of the arch with an explanation of its figures, which included the image of Neptune as an allusion to the Marquis of La Laguna.[89] According to Ilan Stavans, "The poem itself is a web of Biblical and mythological references, all of which reflect the defiant idea that male power depends on female wisdom" (*Poems* xxxvii). Moreover, the *Neptuno alegórico* allowed Sor Juana to build her authorial writing style by initiating an important relation with the viceroyalty. However, with her allegorical *ouvre*, Sor Juana started developing her peculiar artistic style, characterized by the duality of the self, her androgyny, since many of the mythological figures go in pairs, a male and a female (for example, Neptune and his mother Isis, Diana and Febo, Asteria and Jove etc.). In the arch, the wise Neptune is the representation of the Marchioness and his

[89] In the Spanish colonies, they used to erect a physical arch usually made out of wood to celebrate and welcome the entrance of the new Viceroys.

wisdom comes directly from his mother, Isis. Isis is a powerful female figure that appears, in the arch, above the image of Neptune. According to Georgina Sabat de Rivers, in the *Neptuno alegórico* the feminine and the masculine become one: "Isis, principio femenino de la sabiduría es igual a Mistraín, pues este nombre en hebreo significa 'Is, quod est vir, Isis videtur appellata.' Así pues, Isis es el pronombre de varón doblado puesto que contiene la silaba 'is' dos veces." ["Isis, feminine principle of wisdom is the same as Mistraín, considering that this Hebrew name means 'Is, quod est vir, Isis videtur appellata.' For this reason, Isis is the pronoun referring to a male, repeated twice due to the fact that contains two syllables 'is" together] (my translation) (253). Sor Juana, almost resembling Christine de Pizan,[90] one of her predecessors, described an architectural construction that helped her to embed her authorial *persona* in an androgynous style. Sor Juana created a poem in relation to the arch in which all the greatest virtues are represented by two mythological figures, one male and one female, in order to defend her theory that intelligence, knowledge, wisdom etc. are all characteristics of the soul and not of the body. For Sor Juana the soul was androgynous and could inhabit either a male or a female body, as Virginia Woolf will say decades later:

> And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female... The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together,

[90] Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) is an Italian-French late medieval writer and poetess who built a literary city/fortress, *Le Livre de la Cité de Dames* (1405) dedicated to women and for women to be protected and defended in a world of patriarchal male power and control.
Electa Arenal sees the resemblance between Sor Juana and Christine de Pizan in her famous *redondilla* "Hombres necios." Both Sor Juana and Christine de Pizan, like other European women "attempted to subvert the same symbolic and social order that upholds double standards and surreptitious or flagrant, if foolish, misogyny" (Merrim 131).

> spiritually co-operating... Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine… (*A Room Of One's Own* 97).

Works like the *Neptuno alegórico* created anxieties around Sor Juana's *persona* and kept her in the public eye with questions regarding her religious faith: why would a religious woman write about secular and mythological themes? She was aware of her fame and privileged position inside the convent and she fought not to be perceived as superior to the other nuns by visiting them and comforting them. However, she became the target of animosity and envy, both within and without the convent walls, and she became more willing to compare her faith to that of Jesus persecuted by the Pharisees.

> Y si no, ¿cuál fue la causa de aquel rabioso odio de los fariseos contra Cristo, habiendo tantas razones para lo contrario? Porque si miramos su presencia, ¿cuál es más amable que aquella divina hermosura? ¿Cuál más poderosa para arrebatar los corazones?... Pues ¿cómo no le amaban? ¡Ay, Dios, que por eso mismo no le amaban, por eso mismo le aborrecían! Así lo testificaron ellos mismos. (*Poems* 28, 30)
>
> For if not, what was the cause of the rage and loathing the Pharisees directed against Christ, there being so many reasons to love Him? If we behold His presence, what is more powerful to stir one's heart? ... How was it they did not love Him? But God is witness that it was for these very

> acts they did not love Him, that they despised Him. As they themselves testified. (*Poems* 29, 31)

The Church chapter paid Sor Juana two hundred pesos for the *Allegorical Neptune*; however her biggest gain was receiving the access to the confidence of the new Viceroy and Vicereine. After the sudden departure of the former Viceroy, the Marquis of Mancera, and his wife Leonor Carreto, New Spain opened its doors to a new Viceroy, the Marquis of the Laguna, and his wife Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara. It was a great advantage for the nuns to be in good terms with the court "especially since their relations with Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas were far from perfect" (Paz 192). Therefore, Sor Juana's position was to be an intermediary figure able to intervene between the convent and the court. The favor of the new Viceroy and Vicereine strengthened her position in the convent and gave her more independence as well as more influence over her sisters.

VERSES OF LOVE TO LISI, THE MERQUISE MARÍA LUISA MANRIQUE DE LARA

Sor Juana was a thirty-one year old woman when she met the Vicereine Maria Luisa (the Lysi or Philis of her poems) who was only a year younger than her: if we consider 1648 the year in which Sor Juana was born, Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara was born in Spain in 1649. The Vicereine was childless when she arrived in Mexico and had suffered many miscarriages. Her only child, José María, was not born until 1683. The relationship with Maria Luisa was very beneficial for Sor Juana; not only it gave her independence and security in the relations with other sister nuns in the convent of San Jerónimo, but also "we owe to it several unforgettable poems" (Paz 195).

Yo adoro a Lisi, pero no pretendo
que Lisi corresponda mi fineza;

pues si juzgo posible su belleza
a su decoro y mi aprehensión ofendo.

No emprender, solamente, es lo que emprendo:
pues sé que a merecer tanta grandeza
ningún mérito basta, y es simpleza
obrar contra lo mismo que yo entiendo.

Como cosa concibo tan sagrada
su beldad que ni quiere mi osadía
a la esperanza dar ni aun leve entrada:

pues cediendo a la suya mi alegría,
por no llegarla a ver mal empleada,
aun pienso que sintiera verla mía.

(*Obras completas* 150)

I adore Lisi but do not pretend
that Lisi will return my token of love,
for if I deem her beauty within reach,
I offend both her honor and my mind.

To intend nothing is all my intentions;
for I know that to merit so much grandeur
no merit can suffice, and it is foolish
to act contrary to my understanding.

I conceive her great beauty as something so
sacred that audacity does not wish
to give the slightest opening to hope:

for yielding my great happiness to hers,

in order not to see it badly used,
I think I would regret seeing her mine.

(*Selected Works* 39)

Sor Juana's love poems (to Leonor and later to María Luisa) seem to be rooted in the "courtly love" tradition, in which the poetic voice serenates a woman belonging to a higher and unreachable rank. Sor Juana subverts the "courtly love" order by presenting a female poetic voice writing of love to another woman. In her literary subversion, she seems to reach out to Guido Guinizzelli's poetry, in which the "gentilezza" of the heart was the most important characteristic of the human soul. Sor Juana seems to be connecting with Guinizzelli's *cor gentile* (gentle heart) while writing her love verses to both Leonor and María Luisa, her beloved Marquesas. Sor Juana's peculiar subversion of the "courtly love" tradition hides in Guinizzelli's *gentilezza* (gentleness) and *cor gentile*. Her love attraction for the two Marquesas lies in the shared gentleness of the their hearts.

In the later Middle Ages, the *Amour courtois* was a conventionalized moral and literary code that prescribed the behavior of ladies and their lovers. The courtly lover existed only to serve his lady who was married to someone else; therefore his love was inevitably adulterous due to the fact that marriage at that time was the result of business interest or the seal of a power alliance. The Roman poet Ovid provided inspiration in developing the concept of "courtly love." In his famous work *Ars Amatoria*, he presented a lover-slave who was trembling, sleepless, and dying for love and who was excessive in his adoration to the lady to be rewarded with an intimate encounter and the consummation of his passions. The courtly lover, however, while displaying the same passions of the Ovidian lover-slave, was driven by the respect of his lady and a platonic sense of love.

In honoring her two beloved ladies, Sor Juana presents a platonic and mystical conception of love in which she herself is portrayed as the courtly lover writing love verses to her two adored ladies. By positioning her female self in a male role (the poet lover who is honoring and dying of love for his lady), Sor Juana is manipulating the patriarchal "courtly love" tradition to create a new type of love and admiration: a homosocial love from a woman to another woman. In addition, in the tradition of the *amour courtois*, the poet-lover needed a return gesture from his lady in order to keep desiring, loving, and writing; however, Sor Juana subverts this courtly rule by loving and admiring without asking a thing in return: I adore Lisi but do not pretend / that Lisi will return my token of love (*Selected Works* 39). According to Octavio Paz, "Platonism was both a vital and an intellectual necessity. Without strict Platonic dualism, her sentiments and those of María Luisa would have become aberrations" (216).

Ester Gimbernat de González explains how Sor Juana's love poems and sonnets also draw on the technique of the ancient *jarchas*, in which the male poet spoke through a female character's words. "Here, Sor Juana, a woman, speaks as a man, creating a space in which diverse voices dialogue in unison: a simultaneity that allows the discourse to assume the other's voice while still maintaining its own" (Merrim 163). This lyric tradition was characterized by metaphors, paradoxes, and hyperboles ruled by certain conventions whose hierarchical system imposed a set of relationships of values and power. Sor Juana seemed to comply with the technique and become an "absent-present of the utterance" (Merrim 163).

Merrim and Gimbernat de González, rather than think in homosocial terms, think of Sor Juana's poems in terms of the literary tradition of *Jarchas* and courtly love. Paz

does not exclude the presence of Sapphic tendencies between the Tenth Muse and her two ladies friends, even if he is quick to state that: "the only thing that is sure is that their relationship, although impassioned, was chaste" (217). However, a different interpretation of the relation between Sor Juana and the two Marchionesses is possible, departing from the *dolce stil novo*, which I will explain in the following paragraphs, I would argue that Sor Juana admired their "cor gentile"[91] (gentle heart) and connected with them through their shared love for literature, art, and the humanities.[92]

The Italian philosopher Marcilio Ficino[93] coined the expression "Platonic love" and he was the first one who created a formula for this kind of love in philosophy and psychology. He believed in the ethereal body and in planetary influences by reinforcing the doctrines of astrology and of the humors: "black bile and the influence of Saturn were determinants in the melancholic temperament" (Paz 210). Ficino includes in his theory not only the cosmological concept of love and the humors, but also the cosmo-mechanistic affinity among things and beings. The name for this affinity, according to Ficino, was love, which attracted and was attracted by the good. "The good, which ranges from the useful to the perfect, resolves into goodness, and the supreme goodness is God" (Paz 211). For this reason, love was not considered exclusively a union between a man and a woman. If love was a feeling toward the good and toward God, could two men or

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[91] According to the *dolce stil novo*, the *gentilezza* was considered the aristocracy of the heart.

[92] In the convent of San Jerónimo, the nuns organized many days of spectacles in which they could connect with the outside royalty by being accompanied by music, theatrical plays (many of which were written and directed by Sor Juana), literature, and poetry.

[93] Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) was a Florentine philosopher, translator, and commentator, largely responsible for the revival of Plato and Platonism in the Italian early Renaissance. He has been widely recognized for his defense of the immortality of the soul.

two women also experience this feeling toward each other? In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the power of love became increasingly feared among the members of the hierarchal society because love (Eros) was perceived as a passion that was able to erase any level of institution, class, conceptions, and principles. Also, according to Anthony J. Cascardi, during the Spanish Golden Age, there was an important difference between marriage and *amor pasión* (passionate love). Marriage was considered a political bond that allowed a person to improve its socio-economic position, while *amor pasión* was an institution founded by the lovers themselves without any interest in class, religion, or money.

> As the social theorist Niklas Luhmann explained in Love as Passion, the development of a semantics of passionate love oriented ultimately toward marriage was bound up with a large-scale transformation in the nature of social relations, as part of the increasing differentiation and autonomy of individuals within early modern society. Whereas the success or failure of marriage was at one time a matter of public determination, it was increasingly up to the individuals to decide whether a marriage would endure. And while the code of *amor pasión* that accompanied the differentiation of social relationships was at first directed against marriage as a traditional and conservative social institution, passion was gradually incorporated into the vision of an institution founded by the lovers themselves. (69)

From the chivalric poetry of William of Aquitaine to the poets of the *dolce stil novo*[94] (Guinizelli, Dante, and Petrarca), a new conception of love was created which violated not only the social hierarchies, but also the institution of marriage. "… the troubadours were commoners while their ladies were both married and members of the highest nobility…" (Paz 212).

In thirteenth and fourteenth century Italy, the poets of the *dolce stil novo* inherited the *amour courtois* and the combination of those two traditions created a new style of poetry in which the desires and admiration for a loved angelic woman were expressed with verses of love in a situation of separation. Usually the poet/lover could not physically reach his beloved, but he could touch her heart and soul by writing beautiful verses in which he described their impossible love. In order to explain Sor Juana's love and respect for the two Marchionesses, we need to look at one particular *stil novista* and his concept of "gentilezza" (gentle heart): Guido Guinizelli.

Guinizzelli (c. 1230-76) is considered the father of the *dolce stil novo*, a new poetic style in which a deep psychological introspection serves to conciliate the divine and earthly love.[95] The importance of Guinizelli's poetry is the identification between love and "gentilezza" (the aristocracy of the heart, in contrast to the nobility of the blood).

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94 The *dolce stil novo* ("the sweet new style") is a literary style created by a group of Italian poets, mostly Florentine, during the 13th and 14th century, whose vernacular sonnets, canzones, and *ballate* celebrated a spiritual and idealized view of love and of the beloved woman in a way that is sincere, delicate, and platonic.

95 Dante Alighieri always looked at Guinizelli as his "maestro" by dedicating him some beautiful verses in the Divine Comedy: "...quand' io odo nomar sé stesso il padre / mio e de li altri miei miglior che mai / rime d'amor usar dolci e leggiadre…" ["when I heard him declare his name: the father of me and of the others—those, my betters—who ever used sweet, gracious rhymes of love…"] (Digitaldante.columbia.edu, *Purgatorio* XXVI: 97-98).

Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore
come l'ausello in selva a la verdura;
né fe' amor anti che gentil core,
né gentil core anti ch'amor, natura:
ch' adesso con' fu 'l sole,
sì tosto lo splendore fu lucente,
né fu davanti 'l sole;
e prende amore in gentilezza loco
così propïamente
come calore in clarità di foco.

(*Zanichelli Online*)

Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,
As birds within the green shade of the grove.
Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme,
Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.
For with the sun, at once,
So sprang the light immediately;
Nor was Its birth before the sun's.
And Love hath his effect in gentleness
Of very self; even as
Within the middle fire the heat's excess.

(Lieder.net)

According to Guinizzelli, Love is able to make lovers equal because it is founded in the nobility of the soul,[96] and not of the blood. "A dual subversion: poetry and love negated marriages, hierarchies, and lineage" (Paz 213). For all the reasons illustrated above, Sor Juana does not appear to have physical attraction for the Marchionesses, Leonor Carreto

[96] The question of the nobility of blood and of love becomes crucial in the seventeenth century.

and María Luisa Manrique de Lara; instead her attraction is directed to their "gentle" hearts and souls.

Both Marchionesses were exceptional women that did not fall into the general Western conception of woman at that time. They were intelligent and played a strong role in their husbands' political position. For example, the Countess of Paredes, María Luisa, carried Sor Juana's manuscripts with her to Spain and, as Octavio Paz suggests, she probably took over the cost of printing: "the book was a homage to her [Sor Juana] and to the house of Laguna" (199). María Luisa made sure that all of Sor Juana's writings would be printed into a book titled *Inundación Castalida* (*Castalian Inundation*). The book was published in Madrid in 1689, while Sor Juana was still alive and could admire her first publication. María Luisa, just like Leonor Carreto before her, was a very strong woman who shared various values with Sor Juana; they were sisters at heart and that sentiment never left them even when they were forced to live an ocean away from each other.

Sor Juana's love for the two exceptional Marchionesses surpassed the common conception of love and proposed a new type of affection; a type of love that developed inside the "gentle" heart and that made the two genderless souls inseparable. Again, this is in tune with Sor Juana's androgynous technique.

> There is no obstacle to love
> in gender or in absence,
> for souls, as you are well aware,
> transcend both sex and distance. (Paz 219)

As I have explained in Chapter One, since Sor Juana was able to create a genderless liminal space inside the convent, in her "room of her own," perhaps she was also able to create a new type of love, a genderless liminal conception of love, in which the platonic

separation between body and soul took place and destabilized the "normalized" conception of love presented and celebrated by the patriarchal order.

In her various *romances*, *decimas*, *glosas*, and sonnets, Sor Juana mirrors the Platonic motif of the separation between body and soul. Plato believed that the true substances were not physical bodies, which were ephemeral, but rather *Forms* –of which bodies were imperfect copies. These Forms not only make the world possible, they also make it intelligible, because they perform the role of universals. It is their connection with intelligibility what is relevant to the philosophy of mind. Because Forms are the grounds of intelligibility, they are what the intellect must grasp in the process of understanding. In *Phaedo,* Plato presents a variety of arguments for the immortality of the soul, but the one that is relevant for our purposes is that the intellect is immaterial because Forms are immaterial and the intellect must have an affinity with the Forms it apprehends (78b4-84b8). This affinity is so strong that the soul strives to leave the body in which it is imprisoned and dwell in the realm of Forms. Sor Juana felt very close to Plato's theory of dualism and presents this motif throughout her writings. She was always aware of the importance of the soul and its capability to reach knowledge. A soul, according to Sor Juana, did not have gender, but was trapped in a gendered body; a body that would restrain the properties of the soul if attached to a female body.[97] For this reason, since an early age, Sor Juana tried to give her soul a chance to reach knowledge by asking her mother to have her dressed like a young man in order to attend school in Mexico City.

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[97] Through the influence of Plato, the Roman-Catholic tradition further developed the dualism of the body and soul, highlighting the fact that men were able to devout to knowledge and the spiritual life because the pull of their bodies, their body weight, was not as sharp in women. This influence still exists in our days, although less obviously and Paz's interest in Sor Juana's body and sexuality is an example of it.

> Teniendo yo después como seis o siete años, y sabiendo ya leer y escribir, con todas las otras habilidades de labores y costuras que deprenden las mujeres, oí decir que había la Universidad y Escuelas en que se estudiaban las ciencias, en Méjico; y apenas lo oí cuando empecé a matar a mi madre con instantes e importunos ruegos sobre que, mudándome el traje, me enviase a Méjico, a casa de unos deudos que tenía, para estudiar y cursar la Universidad; ella no lo quiso hacer… (*Poems* 14)
>
> When later, being six or seven, and having learned how to read and write, along with all the other skills of needlework and household arts that girls learn, it came to my attention that in Mexico City there were Schools, and a University, in which one studied the sciences. The moment I heard this, I began to plague my mother with insistent and importunate pleas: she should dress me in boy's clothing and send me to Mexico City to live with relatives, to study and be tutored at the University. She would not permit it… (*Poems* 15)

Sor Juana soon discovered that her gender was a social obstacle to her learning. As a young girl, she was already well aware of the opportunities given to men, and of the fact that women were regarded only as housekeepers and child-bearers: "needlework and household arts that girls learn" (*Poems* 15). A woman's soul trapped in a female body would not have the opportunity to reach and acquire knowledge. For this reason, Sor Juana wisely chose the opportunity to be surrounded by books and away from the impediments of a life of marriage. She decided to become a nun in order to be able to read and to allow her androgynous soul to reach the heights of knowledge without being

associated with a female body. The convent was the perfect environment, ruled by a matriarchal social order, in which Sor Juana could push herself to the limit by creating a liminal space of freedom. In this space she did not have to perform any specific gender and was able, through her writing, to challenge, manipulate, and eventually subvert the patriarchal social order and its binary gender rules.

"RESPUESTA A UN CABALLERO DE PERÚ" – "ANSWER TO A GENTLEMAN FROM PERÚ"

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were considered "weak creatures" ("sujetos debiles"), easily inclined to sin. This misogynistic view developed from the feminine inferiority of biblical origins ("A muliere initium factum est peccati, et per illam omnes morimur[98]") and from the image of Eve who, weakened by her body, sinned by giving the untouchable fruit to her companion Adam. For this reason, the male-made socio-patriarchal structure attempted to control women and organize their lives under male supervision and created various venues for women to control their bodily "weaknesses" and sexuality. Fray Luis de León in his famous treatise *La perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*), written in 1583, analyzes one of these avenues, marriage and the role of the perfect wife: a woman who needed to remain silent and not discuss business matters, who had to stay home and refrain from going out in public, and who was responsible for the household as well as for giving birth, breastfeeding, raising, and educating her children. On the other hand, Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret Rosenthal explain how the Roman Catholic Church, in Western Europe, "offered an alternative to the career of wife and mother. A woman could enter a convent parallel in function to the

[98] "The sin began with a woman, and because of her we all died" (Ecclesiastes 25, 33).

monasteries for men that evolved in the early Christian century" (xvi). Moreover, "A convent was the only place in her society where a woman could decently live alone and devote herself to learning" (Arenal, Powell 3). At the age of sixteen, Sor Juana wisely decided to leave the secular world to enclose herself into the four walls of a convent in order to pursue her *negra inclinación* because, during her time, women were not allowed to receive the same literary education that men did, and also they were not allowed to write on religious and philosophical topics. Nuns were to be subjected to both the Spanish church and the crown, served as agents of the church's mission to christianize their surroundings, to guard orthodoxy, and to ensure social obeisance. According to Electa Arenal and Amanda Powel, "Beyond their spiritual roles, nuns –*criollas*[99] like Sor Juana, and even a few *mestizas*[100] –were also influential in economic, social, and educational spheres. They contributed to the arts, crafts, music, and cuisine of the larger community" (6).

Sor Juana, however, "was very different from other women in her intellectual ecumenism and religious rationality as well as her celebrity" (Arenal, Powell 6). The hidden enclosure of the convent of San Jerónimo allowed Sor Juana to nurture her double nature: a female body containing an enormous knowledge. The "Quintessential of the Baroque," as Stephanie Merrim refers to the Mexican prodigious nun (23), valued her soul and her knowledge more than she valued her female body. For this reason, she decided to intern her body in a convent and hide her female *persona* behind a monastic habit in order to nurture her androgynous soul with unlimited knowledge. Sor Juana

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[99] Native-born of Spanish ancestry and blood.

[100] Of mixed white (peninsular Spanish or *criollo*) and Native American ancestry.

sough to negate the difference and accept the co-existence between her female body and knowledge by appropriating "the masculine realm for the feminine and to place them on the same continuum" (Merrim 23). For Sor Juana to be able to write with the mind and words of the ruling order (the male/masculine one) meant to be entitled to (obtain) equal rights to write and exist in that literary world; foreshadowing Virginia Woolf's notion of literary androgyny[101] and the fact that "it is fatal for one who writes to think of their sex" (Woolf 108).

In the "Respuesta a un caballero de Perú" ("Reply To A Gentleman From Perú"), Sor Juana replies to a gentleman who sent her clay vessels accompanied by a message, saying that she should be a man due to the way she wrote. She says:

Y en el consejo que dais,
yo os prometo recibirle
y hacerme fuerza, aunque juzgo
que no hay fuerzas que entarquinen:
porque acá Sálmacis falta,
en cuyos cristales dicen
que hay no sé que virtud de
dar alientos varoniles.

(*Poems* 140)

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[101] Androgyny is a term that was formulated by joining two Greek words. One of those words means male and the other means female. Androgyny, thereafter, was used to refer to a situation in which a person's gender is not clearly defined. It is important not to confuse androgyny with hermaphroditism. When a person is a hermaphrodite, he or she is of mixed sex. A hermaphrodite is physically affected by a body that includes both masculine and feminine organs. Therefore, the person's sex may not be absolutely definable. In the first pages of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is biological while gender is formed by culture and society. Butler questions what sex is and how it is defined then claims that sex is a category of culturally constructed gender (*Gender Trouble* 7). She argues that considering that gender is constructed through culture and society, then there is room for fluidity and androgyny: a "surface politics of the body" (*Gender Trouble* 416).

As for the counsel that you offer,
I promise you, I will attend
with all my strength, although I judge
no strength on earth can en-Tarquin:
for here we have no Salmacis,
whose crystal water, so they tell,
to nurture masculinity
possesses powers unexcelled.

(*Poems* 141)

In these couple of verses, Sor Juana reinforces the double nature of her *persona*, her androgyny. She negates the Peruvian gentleman's accusation that she is a man by explaining that, not only there was no natural power on earth that could make someone great, just like the great man Tarquin (en-Tarquin),[102] but also that, in the convent, there was not a Salmacis fountain that could make a man look more effeminate. Sor Juana explains to the gentleman that she could not become a man, but, more importantly, "she would not want to become the rapist Tarquin" (Harvey 51).[103] According to Octavio Paz, Sor Juana did not refer to the original fountain of Nymph Salmacis (Ovid 4.285-388)[104]

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[102] According to Tamara Harvey "Sor Juana cannot become a man and would not want to become the rapist Tarquin" (51).
Lucius Tarquinius Superbus ("Tarquin the Proud") was the seventh and last king of Rome before it became a Republic. He belonged to the Etruscan Tarquinii clan, reigned from 534 to 510 B.C., and was known for his tyrannical rule. He was finally exiled from Rome after his son Sextus infamously raped Lucretia (wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus).

[103] The image of Tarquin was also used by Maria de Zayas (1590-1661) as he became an important motif in the literature of the Spanish Golden Age.

[104] The fountain of Salmacis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tells the story of the Nymph Salmacis who tried to rape Hermaphrodite and became one with him. For this reason, Hermaphrodite courses the waters of the fountain to have the same properties on others. Hermaphrodite, on seeing himself changed and "his limbs enfeebled, asked his parents Hermes and Aphrodite the concession that whoever came in the pool as a man, should have gone forward as a half-man, and be softened at the touch of the water.

but rather to the version found in Father Victoria's treatise on mythology. In this latter version, Hermaphrodite asked and was granted that all who bathed in the pool would have two sexual natures. However, in my opinion, Sor Juana did refer to the original version by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, because the Peruvian gentleman is not pleased with the Mexican nun's exquisite writing and theological refuting, and therefore he tells her to reveal her real identity, the one of a man hiding behind her monastic habit. For this reason, Sor Juana in this eloquent "Respuesta" in verses, decided to present the metaphor of the Salmacis fountain in order to assure the gentleman that there was no such fountain in the convent of Saint Jerónimo. In other words, she was not a man magically turned into a woman by entering the convent. She was a new creature who could maintain both sexual natures at the same time: a hermaphrodite Phoenix who was able to hide her neutralized sexuality behind the monastic habit and nurture her sexless soul with knowledge. According to Hélène Cixous, women are bisexual and present both sexes (male and female), "… not having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality," like men did (41).[105] In women both sexes naturally coexist without the necessity of annulling one or the other. For this reason, Sor Juana seemed to accept both sexes under her monastic habit while writing as an illustrious man and doing domestic/teaching work like a good religious woman.

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[105] "For historical reasons, at the present time it is woman who benefits from and opens up within this bisexuality beside itself, which does not annihilate differences but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more: in a certain way *woman is bisexual* –man having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality. By insisting on the primacy of the phallus and implementing it, phallocratic ideology has produced more than victim" (Cixous and Clément , *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 41)

In the next few verses, Sor Juana seems to associate the four walls of her convent to the Salmacis fountain in which both genders would mesh together and where she could hide her androgyny under her habit and nobody could "substantiate that state."

Yo no entiendo de esas cosas;
sólo sé que aquí me vine
porque, si es que soy mujer,
ninguno lo verifique.

(*Poems* 140)

I have no knowledge of these things,
except that I came to this place
so that, if true that I am a female,
none substantiate that state.

(*Poems* 141)

In these verses, she diminishes and even doubts her biological female gender condition ("if true that I am a female") and, close to the end of the poem, she negates it and celebrates her open androgyny, which resulted in her religious vows and her Platonism.

Yo también sé que, en latín,
sólo a las casadas dicen
úxor, o mujer, y que
es común de dos lo Virgen.
Con que a mí no es bien mirado
que como a mujer me miren,
pues no soy mujer que a alguno
de mujer pueda servirle;
y sólo sé que mi cuerpo,
sin que a uno u otro se incline,
es neutro, o abstracto, cuanto
sólo el Alma deposite.

(*Poems* 140)

I know, too, that they were wont
to call wife, or woman, in the Latin
uxor, only those who wed,
though wife or woman might be virgin.
So in my case, it is not seemly
that I be viewed as feminine,
as I will never be a woman
who may as woman serve a man.
I know only that my body,
not to either state inclined,
is neuter, abstract, guardian
of only what my Soul consigns.

(*Poems* 141)

Sor Juana does not want to be associated with the female body, given that women are born to serve and give pleasure to men ("…it is not seemly / that I be viewed as feminine, / as I will never be a woman / who may as woman serve a man"). Her monastic habit neutralizes her sexuality and her body is not inclined towards either the masculine or the feminine. "In this witty, ironic poem, Sor Juana replies to the gentleman from Perú with praise and humility in ways that subtly reject his assumption that literary talent is innately masculine… Sor Juana demonstrates that gender itself is abstract" (Harvey 52). However, she participated in the debates of her times as a woman, "engaging in gendered powered dynamics of intellectual life in Mexico City and aware of female precursors and contemporaries" (Harvey 54). She is only aware that her body is neutral, abstract, and genderless; an androgynous body that only serves as a container for something more precious: her soul. A genderless soul that was the only one able to reach the light of

knowledge in the liminal room that she carefully created between the matriarchal environment of the convent and the outside patriarchal social order.

PRIMERO SUEÑO

"Undoubtedly, being a woman limited Sor Juana's ability to pursue a life of the mind and she was intensively aware that others made assumptions about her intellect and soul based on their perceptions of her body" (Harvey 53). According to Electa Arenal, Stephanie Merrim, and Emile Bergmann, among others, Paz failed to place Sor Juana properly because he tried to overemphasize her rebellion as a proto-modern poet and, at the same time, underestimated the goal of her gender criticism. Sor Juana understood throughout her life that her female body was a problem in her pursuit of knowledge and in her writing profession; however, she was able to neutralize the patriarchal fixed binary-gender roles, accept her body, and use its inclinations as the basis for asserting that it was the vessel for her soul's gifts.

In the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,* Sor Juana describes how she learned to read and write when she was only three years old. She went with her sister to the *Amigas*[106] and, at a tender age, convinced one of the teachers that she could also access scholarly education:

> … digo que no había cumplido los tres años de mi edad cuando enviando mi madre a una hermana mía, mayor que yo, a que se enseñase a leer en una de las que llaman Amigas, me llevó a mi tras de ella el cariño y la travesura, y viendo que le daban lección, me encendí yo de manera en el

[106] The *Amigas* term was a term used in the mid-sixteenth century Mexico to designate first the teachers and, later on, the schools. The *Amigas* offered education to girls between three and ten years of age in the rural area of Mexico (and also Perú). Their curriculum was characterized by reading, writing, and simple mathematics (*Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World* 141).

> deseo de saber leer, que engañando, a mi parecer, a la maestra, la dije que mi madre ordenaba me diese lección. (*Poems* 12)
>
> … I declare I was not yet three years old when my mother sent off one of my sisters, older than I, to learn to read in one of those girls' schools that they call *Amigas*. Affection and mischief carried me after her; and when I saw that they were giving her lessons, I so caught fire with the desire to learn that, deceiving the teacher (or so I thought), I told her that my mother wanted her to teach me also. (*Poems* 13)

Sor Juana is a major early modern Hispanic female authorial voice and whose literary *auctoritas* presents a mixture of different traditions (including religious ones). She felt a strong love and desire towards the literary world and education, a desire that will allow her to write one of her most important works, according to modern criticism: *Primero Sueño*.

Primero Sueño, first published in the collection *Obras Completas* in 1692, is one of the most intimate and personal poems written by Sor Juana, even though it is permeated with intellectual characteristics and references. In her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (1691), Sor Juana confesses: "no me acuerdo de haber escrito por mi gusto sino un papelillo que llaman el *sueño*" [I don't remember having written for my own pleasure save a little piece of paper that they call the *dream*] (my translation). According to Octavio Paz, the diminutive "papelillo" does not have to confuse us, because this work is one of the most important, extended and ambitious poems written by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. With the term "papelito," by using the literary strategy of "falsa modestia" (false modesty), Sor Juana diminishes not only her *persona*, but also her work ("papelillo") in

order to escape the constant power of the Inquisition and censorship, and also to distract the male readers/audience from her beautiful and philosophical work that women of her times could have never been able to accomplish.

Primero Sueño is a "silva" (combination of seven-syllable verses and eleven-syllable ones, with an irregular rhyme scheme) composed of nine hundred and seventy five verses. The poem flows without interruptions and fixed divisions; it is a philosophical discourse that happens in the duration of one night. Sor Juana utilizes the natural passing of time, from the dark night to the soft light of dawn, when the timid morning light finds her way into her window. Through her dream-voyage, Sor Juana creates a situation in which the female soul is almost forced to leave the constrictions of the female body and finally fly towards knowledge. Only through the dream of the body, can Sor Juana's androgynous soul rise toward knowledge and subvert the socio-patriarchal condition of women of seventeenth-century Mexico. Although the poem is a long and flowing discourse, some critics (Nanfito, Mckenna, Fiol-Matta etc.) consider the possibility of dividing the poem in three parts. Also, according to Octavio Paz, *Primero Sueño* can be divided in: *El dormir* [the sleep], *El viaje* [the voyage], and *El despertar* [the awakening]. Paz uses the word "dormir" (sleeping) rather than "soñar" (dreaming) in order to accentuate the difference between the ecstatic dream and the ordinary dream.

> En la primera parte del poema sor Juana no describe el sueño o los sueños del mundo y del cuerpo sino su pesado dormir. Estas tres partes se subdividen en siete, que son los elementos básicos del poema. La primera parte se desdobla en *El dormir del mundo* y *El dormir del cuerpo*; la

> tercera parte, a su vez, se bifurca en *El despertar del cuerpo* y *El despertar del mundo*… (483-84)
>
> In the first part of the poem Sor Juana does not describe the dream or the dreams of the world and of the body, rather her own deep sleep. These three parts are divided in seven other parts, which are the basic elements of the poem. The first part is doubled in *The sleep of the world* and *The sleep of the body*; the third part, branches in *The awakening of the body* and *The weakening of the world*… (My translation)

In the first 191 verses of *Primero sueño*, the poetic voice describes the descending of the night and the coming of sleep, not only over the poet, but also over all living creatures. Finally, the soul separates from the body and begins ascending in search of knowledge. No longer tied to the constrictions of the terrestrial body, the soul flies and contemplates the universe from a high position in search of that intellectual flight/knowledge ("vuelo intelectual"). The ascending force that attracts the poet's soul is represented by the images of the pyramids of Memphis, the tower of Babel, and Mount Olympus. "Rather than pursue a mythical, transfigured union with God, the soul seeks knowledge" (McKenna 42). Sor Juana differentiates her soul's journey from all the past mystical tradition, in which the soul of the mystic was called to start its travel in search for that ideal union with God, who represented the unconditional and unique truth because of the importance of the body.

According to Fiol-Matta, and later on to Harvey, the body is important in Sor Juana's *Primero sueño* because it is not divided from the soul and we need to get beyond "the body/soul divide if we are to understand the implications of this poem for Sor

Juana's feminism" (Harvey 60). The body assists silently to the voyage of the soul towards knowledge, which is another form of androgyny seen previously in this Chapter.

> If the body is "left behind" as the soul achieves its pursuit of knowledge, and if, magically, in that resistant last verse, the body becomes gendered once again as female, then the poem has not performed a significant intervention into the body. Additionally, if the soul in the *Dream* is pure, genderless intelligence or faculty, then there is no necessary correlation between the last verse and the subject represented in the poem as the soul, unless one believes that the body is a fairly static object existing on the poem's fringes until the soul finishes its journey and is ready to rejoin the body. (Fiol-Matta 350)

While reading Sor Juana's poem, we need to account for the body, while the soul flies away towards its search for knowledge, in order to understand its awakening with the gendered "despierta" with which the poem ends. According to Fiol-Matta and Harvey, the body is way too dynamic in the poem, "despite its *apparent* corpse-like stasis, to be simply opposed to the soul" (Harvey 60). The soul can pursue knowledge once it gets freed from the body – "un cadaver con alma" ("a cadaver with a soul"); however, in describing this freedom, Sor Juana starts developing in more detail the activities of the body while the soul takes its flight.

> El alma, pues, suspensa
> del exterior gobierno en que ocupada
> en material empleo,
> o bien o mal da el día por gastado,

solamente dispensa,
remota, si del todo separada
no, a los de muerte temporal opresos,
lánguidos miembros, sosegados huesos,
los gajes del calor vegetativo,
el cuerpo siendo, en sosegada calma,
un cadáver con alma,
muerto a la vida y a la muerte vivo,
de lo segundo dando tardas señas
el de reloj humano
vital volante que, sino con mano,
con arterial concierto, unas pequeñas
muestras, pulsando, manifiesta lento
de su bien regulado movimiento. (*Poems* 88: 192-209)
The soul, then, freed from
governing the senses (by which endeavor
and activity it
deems the day is well or poorly spent)
now, it seems, does but
administer (remote, if not completely
disconnected from the temporary
death of languid limbs and inner bones)
the gift of vegetative warmth, the mortal
shell in restful lassitude, cadaver,
yet with a soul imbued,
dead in life, but living still in death,
and, of life's continuation giving
silent indication,
the vital mainspring of the human clock:
its movement marked not by hands but
harmony of vein and artery, the

slow, pulsing, regulation of the heart. (*Poems* 89: 192-209)

The body, therefore, only appears like a corpse. It is sleeping while the soul starts its journey yet connected to the vital mechanism with the pulsing of the "human clock" (the body). The body is indeed important in Sor Juana's *Primero sueño* and that it represents the "vessel for the soul" (Harvey 65). However, Sor Juana recognizes the various limitations of the female body and understands that only by momentarily separating from her body, at night, during sleep, her androgynous soul can fly freely towards the light of knowledge. Her female body is a burden for Sor Juana's pursuit of knowledge due to the *status* of women and their reputation during seventeenth-century Mexico. She understood that her androgynous soul needed to separate from the stigmatized body, only for the duration of one night, yet maintaining vital connections with her female self and female body to eventually awaken to the light of achieved knowledge.

At the beginning if the seventeenth century, theological and philosophical teachings, according to which God was the source of all truth and "divine knowledge was revealed to Church Fathers" (McKenna 38), the advent of the Scientific Revolution (with Kepler, Galileo, Newton etc.) started shaking these fixed theories. Therefore, the empirical investigation was used to challenge the Catholic dogma and scholastic thinking by creating the basis of a new world view. Consequently, the famous French philosopher René Descartes, in *Discourse on Method* (1636), systematized deductive reasoning and pronounced the Latin statement "Cogito Ergo Sum" ("Je pense, donc je suis," later translated in English as "I think, therefore I am"), which became one of the main elements of modern Western philosophy. This statement forms the basis of all knowledge, because it asserts that all things can be questioned, whether they are from the

realm of reality or from the imagination (a dream, for example). According to Descartes, the questioning and doubting of one's own existence, serves as proof of the reality of one's existence. In fact, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, manipulated this statement by Descartes. By using the dream as the "instrument" to "be" (to exist in reality), she somehow succeeded in reversing the base of Western Philosophy and the argument that, for decades, excluded women from the realm of reality, casting them away and placing them at the same level with animals and plants. According to Susan Mckenna, Cartesian thought and Descartes reasoning played an important role in Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*: she claims that Sor Juana, who belonged to an elite assemblage of intellectuals, philosophers, and theologians of the New World's main city, "could not have avoided the new scientific methodologies circulating among her colleagues and peers and, furthermore, that she advances these methods in *Primero sueño* as tools in her painful, personal search for knowledge and truth" (Mckenna 40).

For Sor Juana the word dream has principally four meanings: dream as sleeping, dream as voyage, dream as vision, and dream as ambition, desire, or illusion. The dream is something close to the feeling of death; it is the almost total stopping of the corporal functions. Dreaming is the temporary death of the body and the liberation, also temporary, of the soul. Sor Juana's dream is not the chaotic product of the libido, of the sub-conscious, or of the instinct: it is a rational and spiritual vision. Her dream is something very different from the Freudian concept of the dream, since for Freud the act of dreaming frees the desire as well as the various instincts and the body itself; for Sor Juana though, the dream frees the soul.

What is a dream? From another point of view, looking at the word dream, according to the Oxford English dictionary, is a "series of images, thoughts, and emotions, often with a story-like quality, generated by mental activity during sleep, the state in which this occurs." Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the father of psychoanalysis, revolutionized the study of dreams in his work *The Interpretation of Dreams*. According to Freud, we are able to break socio-cultural repression through the act of dreaming by the unconscious release of our most hidden impulses/urges and desires. Besides, Freud categorizes the mind in three parts: the *Id* (primal impulses, pleasures, desires etc.) the *Ego* (the conscious, the rational, the self-aware aspect of the mind), and the *Superego* (the censor for the *Id*, which is also responsible for reinforcing the moral codes of the *Ego*). When we are awake, the impulses and the desires of the *Id* are controlled and suppressed by the *Superego*. For this reason, Freud explains how through dreams, when our guard is down, our unconscious is able to express freely and release all the hidden desires/impulses of the *Id*. In a similar manner, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz uses the image of the dream in her writings as a tool to escape the reality and structure of the patriarchal system (of control) and finally be able to express her hidden "philosophical" point of view on life and on things. In her time and for many centuries, before and after Sor Juana, women did not have a voice; they were silenced, and, thus "trapped" inside their appearance and female body, which was objectified by patriarchy. Through the literary image of the dream she is able to detach from the socio-economical constrains of her stigmatized body and express her culturally, educationally, philosophically female repressed self.

Looking at the *Sueño* from a spatial point of view, one must keep in mind that in the early texts of the Spanish literary tradition, one can find that there is a pervasive tendency to allegorize space[107] in order to present the transcendent truth inaccessible to man. In the periods following the Middle Ages in Spain, an author would incorporate iconic imaginary into the literary compositions in order to enable the reader to visualize and gather together an interpretation of the text, "in addition to assisting in the objectification of feeling, mood, and emotions" (Nanfito 37). According to Nanfito, the poetic attitude during the Renaissance towards material reality was either "that of idealization, or that of the "spiritual flight of the mystics attempting to flee from the material realm" (37). However, in the poetics of the Baroque reality is not the only point of departure that is transcended in order to reach higher conceptions.

> … the poetic construct of the Baroque is generally associated with physicalsumptuousness and an emphasis on corporeality. Nonetheless, physically special and temporal reality often becomes the mere platform upon which another more complicated and multivalent reality is constructed, a network of relations which serves to connect the described reality with other peripheral realities based upon those poetic correspondences perceived by the Baroque poet as similes or metaphors. (Nanfito 37)

For this reason, one of the most striking characteristics of *Primero sueño* is the dynamism and mobility in which Sor Juana forms her poetics. She moves among her poetic textual space by creating a "transmutation of reality" in which she narrates the tribulations and

[107] In Gonzalo de Berceo (Spain 1190 - 1264)'s works and many other medieval texts present particular symbols and images to illustrate and reveal the transcendent truths that man cannot access.

successive defeats of the soul in its attempt to transgress "established boundaries and behavioral codes" (Nanfito 40). She is able to configure "the map of personal and cultural identities, shifting the borders to disclose alternative spaces in which to envision and forge other utopian spaces where knowledge and creative reflection are universalized rather than gender specific" (Nanfito 40).

Sor Juana's *Primero sueño* represents the independent quest and exploration of the mind in search for intellectual knowledge through the metaphorical image of the flying soul. As we know from McKenna: "Baroque art and literature vividly portray the economic, political and spiritual crises taking place in Europe at this time. Hispanic Baroque poetry, for example, is deliberately opaque, enigmatic, paradoxical, superficial, and ornate" (41). In this historical and literary context, Sor Juana incorporates subtle meanings and deep feelings within the elaborate and embellished verse. Sor Juana utilized the literary genealogy figure by connecting her "oeuvre" to Góngora's *Soledades*. Sor Juana connects herself to Góngora in order to, eventually, subvert the Gongorian technique and finally differentiate and affirm herself as a female writer and author.[108] There are many similarities between *Primero sueño* and Góngora's *Soledades*: "La influencia de Góngora ha sido señalada por muchos, desde el padre Calleja. Por sus latinismos, sus alusiones mitológicas y su vocabulario, Primero sueño es un poema gongorino" (Paz 469) [Góngora's influence has been noticed by many, starting with

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[108] Christine de Pizan is another woman, predecessor of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who manipulates the rhetorical image of genealogy to Dante Alighieri in order to redefine herself as a female author. *Le Livre du Chemin de Long Estude* (*The Book of the Path of Long Study*), written between 1402-03, is a dream journey in which Christine presents herself as the "chosen one;" the one that has to bring a message (discussed at the Court of Reason) to the future king of France.

Father Calleja. For its Latinisms, its mythological allusions, and its vocabulary, *Primero sueño* is a Gongorian poem] (my translation).

> Llegó, en efecto, el Sol cerrando el giro
> que esculpió de oro sobre azul zafiro:
> de mil multiplicados
> mil veces puntos, flujos mil dorados
> –líneas, digo, de luz clara –salían
> de su circunferencia luminosa,
> pautando al Cielo la cerúlea plana; (*Poems* 127, 129)
> In sum, the Sun had risen, closing
> a circle sketched of gold on sapphire blue:
> a thousand thousand
> sparkling motes and spokes of fire
> –lines, I say, of purest light –beamed
> from its luminous circumference,
> etching the sky's cerulean expanse; (*Poems* 126, 128)

In these few verses of the poem, Sor Juana carefully substitutes many of the words (that have been hispanicized from the Latin and Greek) with viable alternatives from the existing Spanish lexicon. "The incorporation of other preciosities" enables Sor Juana "to create a conceptually difficult and obscure landscape" that reinforces the abstract and geometrical nature of this intellectual voyage. Throughout her poetic composition and its dynamic/mobile images, Sor Juana is able to fully express the essence of the "soul's very being" (Nanfito 72-73).

According to Octavio Paz, in his important reading of Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*, the poem is modeled on *Soledades*; however there are more differences than similarities: For example, Sor Juana has more of a tendency to present acute concepts, rather than brilliant metaphors. Also, whereas the sensual Góngora exaggerates descriptions –of things,

images, people, and landscapes – Sor Juana concentrates her writing in abstract concepts, rather than the real.

> Whereas Gongora's treatment of the spatial dimension is fundamentally aesthetical, sensorial, in the case of Sor Juana, however, it is primarily and indisputably intellectual, cerebral, and the stylistic aspect of the text subserves the overriding tendency to spatialize the principle thematic concerns. (Nanfito 72)

Moreover, Gongora's language is aesthetic –based on colors, forms, people, and particular objects. The *Soledades* are descriptive "silvas" dealing with the ocean, the field, its busy and holy days.

Primero sueño is also a "silva," but it is not a description, it is a philosophical discourse based on an abstract topic. It is a unique "oeuvre," characterized by different episodes of a spiritual experience (and quest). *Primero sueño* reveals rather an intellectual journey, "the noble exaltation of the poet's insatiable thirst to comprehend all knowledge" (McKenna 42). In the opening stanzas, the poem is characterized by opposite images, binary opposites: the differences between night and day, darkness and light. Sor Juana explicitly borrows the *Chiaroscuro*, a technique used by Baroque painters and artists to create an effect of light and shade on the surface that would give to the work dramatic visual effects: "tenebrosa guerra," "negros vapores," "pavorosa sombra fugitiva," "atezado seño." (*Primero sueño* 7-11). All these "dark" images are in contrast with the images of light, solar images, of the last stanza: "luz judiciosa," luz más cierta," "el Mundo iluminado." (*Primero sueño* 969-75).

According to McKenna's critical article, another important aspect of Sor Juana's poem and imagery is the platonic allegory representing knowledge as light and ignorance as darkness. "The soul's aspiration toward the light from above is to know God, not in the sense of mystical union, but rather to contemplate the Supreme Being in full comprehension of the universe" (43). The darkness of the night allows Sor Juana's soul to leave the body and search for the illuminating knowledge. So far it would appear like Saint John of the Cross' *Noche oscura* (*Dark Night*). However Sor Juana is able to invert/subvert the past "male" tradition: she sees the possibility of reaching the light and its knowledge through darkness and the allegorical voyage of the soul. Moreover, Sor Juana is able to describe her desire for knowledge in depth, not only by using the night and the darkness as a cover for her prohibited quest (because women were prohibited to acquire philosophical or literary knowledge unless it represented a mystical search and eventual union with God), but also by reversing the ancient male/patriarchal *Canons* of literary and philosophical discourse. The soul represented in *Primero sueño* does not have gender and we find out that the soul is Sor Juana's only at the end of the poem: "… y yo despiert**a**" [my bold] (*Primero sueño* 975). The last adjective of the poem, in Spanish, is clearly feminine and it refers to the body and soul of the poet, finally reunited, and waking up to the light of dawn coming through the window. According to Jacqueline Cruz, the fact that the poem is entirely written in a masculine discursive method could confuse the reader and spread the wrong idea that Sor Juana is agreeing with the patriarchal devaluation of "feminine" discourses. However, Sor Juana is really interested in representing and, at the same time, transcending the irrational structure used by the

male dominant order of chaining women to a position of inferiority and of exclusion from the intellectual and artistic world.

> El resto del poema deja traslucir que el método discursivo, más propiamente "masculino," es el que cuenta con sus simpatías. Esto podría interpretarse como complicidad con el sistema patriarcal en su desvalorización de los discursos "femeninos." Sin embargo, lo que mueve a sor Juana es el deseo de trascender el encasillamiento en la irracionalidad de que se ha servido el orden dominante para mantener a la mujer en situación de inferioridad y excluirla del ejercicio intelectual y artístico. (Cruz 536)

With *Primero sueño*, Sor Juana not only uses a male authorial figure like Luis de Góngora and transforms/reverses his literary technique as genealogy towards her own feminine authorial *persona* and identity, but she also constructs her entire poem on a properly "male" discursive method in order to emerge, in the end, as a complete and knowledgeable female master of the philosophical and literary world. Thus, Sor Juana tries to show men and their disabling patriarchal social structure that there is no difference between male and female souls in their desire for knowledge. Both men and women are similarly able to reach that light/knowledge through a similar method, once they have abandoned the corporal chains that, for women, are much stronger and more difficult to break. Sor Juana embodies the "critical spirit and independent tenets characteristic of the dawning Enlightenment" (McKenna 47). She sets the path of narrative strategies that future generations of women authors will utilize in order to

engage and subvert patriarchal conventions in the attempt to reach that true female literary authority.

With *Primero sueño* Sor Juana presents various difficulties/limitations of her dream journey, due to her female *status* that complicates the search for knowledge and her acquisition of *auctoritas*. Sor Juana chooses a mythological character to represent her own impossibilities, as a woman, to reach knowledge: the rebellious imagery of Icarus, the mortal who flew too close to the sun. Full of personal ambition and mostly arrogance, Icarus did not listen to the father's warnings and he experienced a terrible fall. With man-made waxwings, the boy wanted to fly high and approach the sun, but his wings melted and his body dropped rapidly to the ground. For scholarly criticism, the image of Icarus is important in *Primero sueño*, because he represents Sor Juana's personal life experience and the failure of her search for knowledge. However, according to Paz, Phaëton, not Icarus, represents a rare, yet fundamental blend of reason and daring that aids Sor Juana in transgressing by going against the literary patriarchal structure of power and finally reaching the light/knowledge.

> La figura de Faetón fue determinante para Sor Juana de dos maneras. Primero como ejemplo intelectual que reúne el amor al saber y la osadía: la razón y el ánimo. Enseguida, porque representa a la libertad en su forma más extrema: la trasgresión. El tema de Faetón aparece varias veces en su obra, siempre como imagen de la libertad que se arriesga y no teme romper los límites. (504)

At the end of her dream journey, Sor Juana is able to reach the light of knowledge, a knowledge that plays an important role in her writings: it allows her to define her female

persona as a writer/*auctor* in a still social, economical, and literary patriarchal structure. Sor Juana is abruptly awakened: while sleeping, she is touched by the judicious light of dawn ("luz juiciosa") and suddenly brought back to the colorful real world. Sor Juana is re-enacting the act of "coming into life" as "coming into light" as it still remains in other languages ("venire alla luce" in Italian and "venir a luz" in Spanish). By waking up from her deep sleep Sor Juana is birthed again; a new birth that embraces her with authorship and the female power to inscribe her female identity as writer and *auctor* of her own destiny.

In conclusion, Sor Juana utilizes subversive strategies in order to break from the literary patriarchal tradition and create a new literary genre that would allow women to reach not only their personal knowledge, but also their authorial writing *persona*. Sor Juana strongly rejects the male-inscribed authority. First, she rejects the intuitive doctrine presented by the Catholic Roman Church and its authorities in favor of a proto-scientific mode of experiment and analysis (as her soul experiences a philosophical dream journey). Second, she deviates from the scientific and systematic reasoning in order to promote her own conclusions: the possibility of the female soul, brain, and body to be able to freely discover knowledge and with it break the chains of a generational patriarchal social structure that constrained women into the mother/nun/courtesan roles.

Moreover, it is important to notice the use of voiceless imaginary (the silent dream) in *Primero sueño*. The communication takes place through silence. "The power of silence to communicate is a strategy employed by women writers throughout the ages" (McKenna 49). Sor Juana possibly feared the wrath of the Church authorities and, consequently, the Inquisition's censorship and punishment. She used the rhetorical figure

of "genealogy" to Góngora, her male literary model, in a larger enterprise of self-representation and self-authorization as a female writer/*auctor*. She encoded her writing with ornamental imagery full of multiple and hidden meanings in order to achieve a new female form of self-expression. *Primero sueño* is an exquisite example of skillful manipulation of the male discourse, through the artifice of the dream, in order to create a new way of expression that will allow women, whose body is still subjected to the patriarchal organization and control, to detach from their "chained" body and freely travel with their minds/souls… and dream… and finally convert their *personae* from passive objects to active subjects.

LA *RESPUESTA A SOR FILOTEA DE LA CRUZ* – THE *ANSWER TO SOR FILOTEA DE LA CRUZ*

After the departure from New Spain of her good friend the Vicereine María Luisa, Marquise de la Laguna, Sor Juana received the publication of her first volume of works (the *Castalian Inundation*, 1689) as a gift. Later, Sor Juana will send the Marchioness other texts in order to add to the volume for a second edition (1691) and to create another volume of her works (1692). The new Viceroy, Melchor Portocarrero y Lasso de la Vega, Count of Monclova, and his wife spent a few years in the viceroyalty of Mexico before being transferred in 1689 to the one in Peru. He did not have a great impact on Sor Juana's work and neither did the following Viceroys and Vicereines –even the last Viceroy in Sor Juana's time, the Count of Galve who governed from November 1688 to February 1696. In spite of the length of his tenure, longer than the one of the Marquis de la Laguna, he did not receive many dedicated poems from the Tenth Muse, and neither did his wife. However, Sor Juana kept writing a socio-political correspondence with the

Viceroy and Vicereine in order to maintain a solid relation with the Court and Spain. From the time she took the veil in 1669 until about 1690, Sor Juana lived a protected and secure life in the convent of Saint Jerónimo. She also took care of relatives and borrowed money to pay for the expenses of her niece, María de San José, who became a nun in the same convent. She acquired a great notoriety from Spain to all of South America.

> Admirers wrote to her from Madrid, Seville, Lima, and Quito; she became famous in Spain and South America as in Mexico. The locutory of the convent had become a kind of salon where, over cups of chocolate, biscuits, and fruit, conversations on literature and theology thrived, poems were recited and improvised, reputations were made and destroyed. (Paz 271)

Sor Juana's serious quarrel started in 1690 when she sat down to write an argument against a celebrated Portuguese Jesuit Friar, Father Antonio de Vieyra, "one of the most eloquent and distinguished Christian thinkers and orators of the seventeenth century, admired especially in Spain and Mexico" (*Poems* xiii). In 1650, on Holy Thursday, Vieyra had delivered a sermon[109] on one of Jesus' important *finezas* (divine acts of loving kindness toward human kind) in the Royal Chapel in Lisbon. Vieyra was a clever thinker and a manipulative speaker. He carefully quoted from Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Augustine, but took issue with their thoughts and claimed that they failed to understand the real meaning behind Christ's greatest *fineza*: the washing of his disciples' feet, including the ones of Judas. For this reason, on the other

[109] "These kind of speculative sermons were often at the center of heated theological debates in Spain and Portugal and, as in Father Vieyra's case, these debates produced decades-long repercussions in their American colonies" (Poems xiii).

side of the Atlantic, almost four decades later, Sor Juana reopened the discussion on the *finezas* and discussed Father Vieyra's thesis during an academic gathering in her cloister of the order of San Jerónimo. "She praised Father Vieyra's wisdom and applauded his scope but sharply criticized his understanding of Christ's love for humanity" (*Poems* xiii). Therefore, she accused him of misunderstanding Jesus' greatest *fineza*. According to Sor Juana, the washing of the disciples' feet was not a demonstration of love in itself, like Father Vieyra had determined, but evidence of Christ's love for humanity. Sor Juana embellished her quasi-heretical argument by using Greek quotes, Latinisms, and biblical references: "We appreciate and we ponder the exquisiteness of divine love, in which to reward is a benefaction and to chastise is a benefaction, and the absence of benefaction is the greatest benefaction, and the absence of a fineza is the greatest fineza" (*Poems* xiv). Sor Juana wrote in her *Carta atenagórica* that:

> Christ's love is very different from that of man. Man wishes love to be reciprocated for his own good. Christ desires that same reciprocation for the good of others, of man himself. In my opinion, the author [Vieyra] wandered some distance from this point, for he misunderstood and stated the opposite; seeing a selfless Christ, he persuaded himself that Christ did not desire his love to be requited. The fact is that the author did not distinguish between reciprocation and the utility of that reciprocation… Hence the author's proposition that Christ desired requited love not for himself but for man. My own view is that Christ did wish that his love be returned, but he desired the utility resulting form that reciprocation for the sake of man. (Paz 393)

After the heated theological discussion among Sor Juana and the Mexican clergy in San Jerónimo, the Bishop of Puebla asked her to put her thoughts on Vieyra's sermon in writing; the result was the *Carta atenagórica*[110] (the *Athenagoric Letter*): a treatise on theology and on ecclesiastic politics. The letter circulated unofficially for a short period of time until the Bishop of Puebla, Fernández de Santa Cruz, without Sor Juana's permission, published the *Letter* at his own expense in November 1690. He also sent a copy to Sor Juana with a "special" and personal dedication and, months later, he followed up with an epistle in which, under the pseudonym of Sor Filotea de la Cruz (Saint Francis of Sales[111] had used the same pseudonym to write to nuns), he asked her to give up her secularism, abandon the road of reason, and devote herself only to religious silent and faith.

> *Carta atenagórica de la madre Juana Inés de la Cruz, religiosa profesa de velo y coro en el muy religioso convento de San Jerónimo… Que imprime y dedica a la misma sor Filotea de la Cruz, su estudiosa aficionada en el convento de la Santísima Trinidad de la Puebla de los Angeles* (*Athenagoric Letter of Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Professed Nun in the Most Spiritual Convent of San Jerónimo… Printed and Dedicated to That Same Sister by Sister Filotea de la Cruz, Her Studious Follower in the Convent of the Most Holy Trinity in Puebla de los Angeles*). (Paz 390)

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110 A letter "worthy of the wisdom of Athena" (Paz 389).

111 Francis of Sales (1567-1622) was the Bishop of Geneva and is honored as a saint in the Catholic Church, canonized by Pope Alexander VII on April 8th, 1665. He became known for his deep faith and his gentle approach toward the religious divisions in his land after the Protestant Reformation. He is also known for his writings on spiritual direction and formation. He wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*.

At this time, while Sor Juana's health was suffering, she also had to deal with the consequences of the letter. "Her supporters applauded her audacity and determination, but her opponents accused her of insolence and disrespect to a luminary, whose authority could not be denied" (*Poems* xiv).

The bishop's letter criticized Sor Juana's attitude towards her life not only as a religious figure but also as a woman, because, once more, she was challenging the patriarchal gender role system by escaping her religious-woman-role: she used her written word to criticize a celebrated male theologian and Father of the Church. The letter that he sent is written very clearly and in a direct language; "the reasoning is sometimes dry and labored –as a polemical and theological composition it is doubly serious –but in the pauses there is a hint of alleviation and a knowing smile to the reader" (Paz 390). The Bishop of Puebla exhorted Sor Juana to stop contemplating secular learning to finally start exploring religious matters:

> What a pity that such a great intellect should so lower itself by unworthy notice of the Earth as to have no desire to penetrate what comes to pass in Heaven; and, having already stooped to the Earth, may it not descend farther to consider what comes to pass in Hell.[112] (Paz 398)

Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz y Sahagún was born in Palencia, Spain, in 1637. He studied with the Jesuits in Salamanca and was a student of Pedro Godoy, a famous Dominican theologian. At the age of thirty-five he was declared Bishop of Chiapas and later of Guadalajara. In 1676 he became Bishop of Puebla, a position that he held until his

[112] "Lástima es que tan gran entendimiento de tal manera se abata a las rateras de la tierra, que no desee penetrar lo que pasa en el Cielo; y ya que se humille al suelo, que no baje mas abajo, considerando lo que pasa en el Infierno."

death in 1699. According to Octavio Paz and, later on, to Puccini, Sor Juana's *Carta atenagórica*, which Fernández de Santa Cruz published without her consent, represents a polemical text in which the criticism of Vieyra is a veiled criticism toward the Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas.

> Fernández had been the first of the two to arrive in Mexico. The bishopric of Puebla was the most important in New Spain with the exception of Mexico City, and it was natural that, at the departure of Fray Payo, Bishop Fernández de Santa Cruz should aspire to his post as well as to the post of Viceroy. (Paz 402)

The other aspirant to the archbishopric of Mexico City was Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, Bishop of Michoacán at that time. He was known for his severe principles, moral intransigence, and intellectual prestige "as demonstrated by Vieyra's dedication" (Paz 401). Aguiar y Seijas had met Vieyra in person (or at least corresponded with him) and, for this reason, Vieyra himself dedicated the two volumes of translated sermons to him. Also, "Being Galician, Aguiar y Seijas probably had friends and acquaintances in Portugal" (Paz 404).

The publication of Sor Juana's *Carta atenagórica* seemed to be a strategic attack from the Bishop Fernández de Santa Cruz to the Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas due to old resentments.

> That criticism came from a woman, a new humiliation to Aguiar, who despised and scorned women. The *Carta* is published by the Bishop of Puebla, who thus cloaks Sor Juana in his authority. The Bishop writes a

> prologue hidden behind a female pseudonym: ridicule and insult for Aguiar y Seijas. (Paz 403)

Therefore, according to both Paz and Puccini, the Bishop of Puebla used Sor Juana and her rhetoric as instruments for his strategic revenge. However, neither critic can define if the idea of humiliating Aguiar y Sijas through a woman's criticism of his much-admired Vieyra, originated with Sor Juana or with Fernández de Santa Cruz.

The *Carta atenagórica* appeared at the end of November of 1690 and Sor Juana took some time before writing her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*The Answer to Sor Filotea de la Cruz*) that was dated March 1st of 1691. The Answer is a text that incorporates many literary strategies, from the legal/mystic brief autobiography to the intellectual discourse. It feels like Sor Juana was not answering only to the Bishop of Puebla (Sor Filotea) but also to all her critics. She realized that she was being attacked mostly for being a woman, and her defense "was immediately transformed into a defense of the female sex" (Paz 415). According to Octavio Paz she was also constantly in battle within herself. Paz questions the fact that Sor Juana always lived in ambivalence: "is she a nun or a writer?" (415). In my opinion, Sor Juana had been questioning why these two characteristics (a nun and a writer) should be distinct and could not be part of the same female subject. Sor Juana was a woman who had the capability, intelligence, and knowledge of writing and teaching, characteristics that, at that time, were only associated with a males. Therefore, she questioned in her *Response/Answer*:

> Porque ¿qué inconveniente tiene que una mujer anciana, docta en letras y de santa conversación y costumbres, tuviese a su cargo la educación de las doncellas? Y no que éstas o se pierden por falta de doctrina o por

querérsela aplicar por tan peligrosos medios cuales son los maestros hombres… (*Poems* 54)

For what objection can there be that an older woman, learned in letters and in sacred conversation and customs, have in her charge the education of young girls? This would prevent these girls being lost either for lack of instruction or for hesitating to offer instruction through such dangerous means as male teachers… (*Poems* 55)

As it is apparent in the text, she was concerned with the fate of other women, mostly young girls of means, who were frequently instructed by male teachers or, in the convent, by father confessors. She believed in and fought for the compatibility of her vocations: being a religious woman, a writer, and eventually a teacher. By writing the *Answer to Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, Sor Juana performed an act of liberation from the patriarchal canon and a (re)appropriation of her *persona*, a type of female *persona* that was a burden for powerful men like the Bishop Fernández de Santa Cruz.[113] According to Sor Juana, men in power and with the ability to write became dangerous because it was like putting a sword in the "hands of a madman:"

A estos, vuelvo a decir, hace daño el estudiar, porque es poner espada en manos del furioso; que siendo instrumento nobilísimo para la defensa, en sus manos es muerte suya y de muchos… les fuerza la necesidad y falta de ancianas sabias a llevar maestros hombres enseñar a leer, escribir y contar, a tocar y otras habilidades, de que no pocos daños resultan, como

[113] There is a new wave of criticism that is bringing into discussion the fact that Fernández de Santa Cruz was a real friend of Sor Juana Inés and that he used the *escamotage* of Sor Filotea and the *Carta Atenagórica* to give Sor Juana an opportunity for literary fame and prestige.

> experimentan cada día en lastimosos ejemplos de desiguales consorcios… (*Poems* 48, 50)
>
> To such men, I repeat, study does harm, because it is like putting a sword in the hands of a madman: though the sword be the noblest of instruments for the defense, in his hands it becomes his own death and that of many others… necessity and the lack of learned [wise] older women oblige them to employ men as instructors to teach reading and writing, numbers and music, and other skills. This leads to considerable harm, which occurs everyday in doleful instances of these unsuitable associations. (*Poems* 49, 51)

Sor Juana was aware of the literary restrictions that the generational patriarchal structure had laid over women, and also, the consequences that this male system of control had caused to women's fate. For this reason, Sor Juana decided to undertake the epistolary genre (one of the few genres that women could practice) to manipulate its structure and start her own defense and the defense of the female kind.

The epistolary genre, like the dialogs, was something typical of the womanly world because, in order to be in contact with family and loved ones, women had to send letters (written by themselves or by some men that used to write as a profession).

> From the fourteenth century on… Women continued to write devotional literature… They also wrote diaries, often intended as keepsakes for their children; books of advice to their sons and daughters; letters to family members and friends; and family memoirs, in a few cases elaborated enough to be considered history. (Jones, Rosenthal xxi)

Sor Juana used the epistolary genre as an instrument of liberation and (re)appropriation: to come out of her submissive status as a woman and to fight for her rights as a human being. Ryan Prendergast explains in his critical essay how Sor Juana is able to construct through her writings her own subjectivity (even if she is able to occupy multiple positions). She represents and defends herself from these criteria well manipulated by the patriarchal structure.

> The *Respuesta* constitutes only one instance of Sor Juana's on-going process of self-representation, although it might be the most direct. She constructs her subjectivity throughout her writing in constantly changing ways, occupying different subject positions. She frames herself within common Baroque poetic conventions, not only by imitating but also by manipulating the established norms. (31)

She read and absorbed the words of the ancients (the classical writings of Greek and Roman authors) and also of the biblical tradition. However, in her *Answer*, Sor Juana only used these patriarchal sources of knowledge to revive her own feminine style and thoughts, and apply it to what was more relevant to her: the (re)appropriation of her female body as a religious woman and writer. Also, the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* is an extraordinary example of how a "simple" letter could be used as something deeply powerful: a feminine writing that reclaims its own identity as a genre and as a person. According to Ryan Prendergarst, Sor Juana in her response letter to the bishop's accusations, was able to change the typical rhetorical constructions of any masculine literary work.

> In Sor Juana's *oeuvre*, one can see conscious rhetorical strategies at work within the framework of the Baroque poetic conventions that she both imitates and deconstructs, demonstrating a desire to showcase or display her knowledge, poetic achievements, and herself. Both a woman and a nun, she was inscribed within strict societal and ecclesiastic boundaries. (30)

In the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,* Sor Juana seemed to be influenced by the mystical literature that started to appear during the sixteenth century in Spain and quickly spread through its colonies. The mystic impulse had its roots in the Reform of the Franciscan Order and their concept of *Recogimiento* (a mystical contemplation in which one would abandon the self to reach the love of God). For example, Saint Teresa of Avila accepted the concept of *Recogimiento* (a spiritual and mental seclusion) as soon as she read Francisco de Osuna.[114] Also, in Spanish America, almost a century later, Sor Josefa de la Concepción de Castillo, considered one of the best mystics of the colonial period, mentioned Osuna as one of her important readings. Although the *Recogimiento* was an important element in the mysticism, it was not the only path followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The more conservative members of the church continued to follow prayers and devotional acts, like Saint Ignacio of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*, while others, more radical, started to adopt Erasmus' believes and alumbrados'

[114] Francisco de Osuna was the founder of *Recogimiento* and the author of the *Abecedario Espiritual* (Spiritual Primer) and other spiritual books accepted throughout Spain.

concepts[115] of receiving God's grace. This latter spiritual concept became heretical after the Council of Trent.

The church of the Counterreformation stressed the importance of prayer and spiritual exercises, the cult of Virgin Mary and the saints, and the role of the church as an intermediary between mankind and God.

> Mysticism and *recogimiento* did not disappear in the seventeenth century. The discalced orders, for example, adopted canons of prayers and austerity with roots in *recogimiento* and a number of theologians writing in that period followed its tenets. However, there was in that century a return to more classic forms of spirituality, based on concepts such as the need to uproot vices and replace them with virtues through attendance of religious ceremonies (mass, eucharist, etc.), prayer, and acts of penance and devotion. The blend of these trends is reflected in the works written for and by nuns and in the norms of religious life adopted by convents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries… (Merrim 64).

Regarding writing and models, Virginia Woolf once said: "we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure" (*A Room of One's Own* 79). For this reason, Sor Juana was familiar with the important mystic women that preceded her and took them into consideration while writing her *Respuesta* in which she analyzes her life to justify her "dark inclination" toward literature and humanities. Sor Juana wisely manipulated the diction, topoi, and forms of the typical *Vida,* written by known churchwomen of that time

[115] The *alumbrados* (illuminists) were spiritual people who believed that they could reach a connection with God without any need for devotional or meditative church works (Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, Chapter 4 and 5).

under the supervision of father confessors. According to Stephanie Merrim, "In Santa Teresa de Jesús's *El libro de su vida* (The Book of Her Life), *Su vida* (Her Life) of Colombian Madre Castillo, or the spiritual autobiography of Mexican Madre María de San Joseph…" (26) we find hallucinated mystical discourse with its own stylistic writing and exclamations ("no sé" –I don't know, "no entiendo" –I don't understand, "no sé decir –I don't know how to explain etc.) that blur the boundaries between the real and the unreal in which "the writer is at times possessed by the Spirit who speaks through her" (26). This Spirit that took over their body and soul would fragment women's mystical autobiographies and their writing would appear chaotic and illogical with a rich and bizarre imaginary. On the contrary, Sor Juana, while imitating the mystical writing of such women, became the antithesis of the mystical writing by also negating its purpose. In opposition to the divine chaos and lack of logic of other nuns' *Vidas*, "Sor Juana deploys her logical powers to construct an eminently reasoned *apologia pro vita sua*" (Merrim 27). In the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, she rewrites her life through not in divine but in scientific terms. Also, instead of creating a text characterized by terms of "not understanding" her position (such as "I don't know," "I don't understand" etc.), she dedicates her *Vida*, herself, and her explication to the quest for knowledge. "And finally, where other nuns depict themselves as the underserving handmaidens of divine forces, Sor Juana audaciously equates herself with Christ, in that distinction has brought martyrdom to them both" (Merrim 27).

Sor Juana's quest for knowledge was very strong from a very young age, although the usual education of young girls in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was characterized by a strict indoctrination in the principles of faith of the so-called womanly

occupations (weaving, sawing, cooking, cleaning etc.). Rarely could young girls access reading and writing. "An educated woman who passed beyond mere literacy to the reading of literary or historical texts, or who knew Latin and had some notion of mathematics, was an unusual individual in the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (Merrim 64). Sometimes, parents interned their daughters in convents either to insure them a "womanly" education or simply to have them raised under a strict religious orthodoxy. Also, some parents hoped that, during this time in the convent, their daughter would receive the "call" and remain in the religious life, since it carried a considerable degree of social prestige. Therefore, many of these vocational calls in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were due to the fact that young girls grew up in the convents and were confortable only in that environment, so that it was hard to abandon it.

In the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,* Sor Juana explained quite clearly that she was lacking religious vocation and that she entered the convent due to her "dark inclination" and also to her complete rejection of married life:

> 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 materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación; a cuyo primer respeto (como al fin más importante) cedieron y sujetaron la cerviz todas las impertinencillas 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. (*Poems* 14,16)
>
> And so I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions (I refer to superficial, and not fundamental, regards) most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life the least unsuitable and the most honorable I could elect if I were to insure my salvation. Working against that end, first (as, finally, the most important) was the matter of all the trivial aspects of my nature that nourished my pride, such as wishing to live alone, and wishing to have no obligatory occupation that would inhibit the freedom of my studies, nor the sounds of a community that would intrude upon the peaceful silent of my books. (*Poems* 15,17)

She professed her faith knowing that life in a convent entailed certain conditions "most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life the least unsuitable and the most honorable I could elect if I were to insure my salvation." Sor Juana entered the convent more for intellectual reasons than religious ones. However, the act of entering the convent and professing was her own decision and she never regretted it. She had always been a different kind of woman with powerful and literary assets that would have allowed her to dominate many men. Knowledge beyond the patriarchal structure and parameters was not for women. Therefore, "The dominant woman was not acceptable to seventeenth-century religious thinkers and educators" (Merrim 66).

Sor Juana was not a typical nun, "she obeyed her conventual duties, but at the same time, she didn't seem to have a clear sense of religious vocation, as most of her companions did" (such as Sor Marcela de San Félix, Lope de Vega's daughter, Luisa Roldán of Spain, and Sor María de San José of colonial Mexico –a self-flagellating mystic who was requested by the Bishop of Puebla to record her visions, among many others) (*Poems* xxi). Sor Juana's love for literature and the humanities developed early in her *persona* and stood out through the subtlety of her subversion and her pursuit of secular forms of knowledge. In order to chase her *negra inclinación*, she had to become an anomaly, a *rara avis* (rare bird) of Mexico. The *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* is filled with anecdotes about her love affair with learning and books:

> … digo que no había cumplido los tres años de mi edad cuando enviando mi madre a una hermana mía, mayor que yo, a que se enseñase a leer en una de las que llaman Amigas, me llevó a mi tras de ella el cariño y la travesura, y viendo que le 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. (*Poems* 12)
>
> … I will tell you that I was not yet three years old when my mother determined to send one of my elder sisters to learn to read at a school for girls we call the *Amigas*. Affection, and mischief, caused me to follow her, and when I observed how she was being thought her lessons I was so inflamed with the desire to know how to read, that deceiving –for so I knew it to be –the mistress, I told her that my mother had meant for me to have lessons too. (*Poems* 13)

At the age of three, Sor Juana "was inflamed with the desire" of learning and acquiring a certain knowledge that was reserved to men. She always had a love/hate relationship with her female body because she understood that her body was refraining her from pursuing that knowledge. For this reason, as she recalls in her *Respuesta,* she tried to find an alternative, a way to be able to go to the schools in Mexico City in which she could reach that beloved knowledge.

> Teniendo yo después como seis o siete años, y sabiendo ya leer y escribir… oí decir que había Universidad y Escuelas en que se estudiaban las ciencias, en Méjico; y apenas lo oí cuando empecé a matar a mi madre con instantes e importunos ruegos sobre que, mudándome el traje, me enviase a Méjico, a casa de unos deudos que tenía, para estudiar y cursar la universidad. (*Poems* 14)
>
> When later, being six or seven, and having learned how to read and write… it came to my attention that in Mexico City there were Schools, and a University, in which one studied the sciences. The moment I heard this, I began to plague my mother with insistent and importunate pleas: she should dress me in boy's clothing and send me to Mexico City to live with relative, to study and be tutored at the University. (*Poems* 15)

Young Sor Juana did not succeed in convincing her mother, but her androgynous soul was already working its way through her female body: "she should dress me in boy's clothing and send me to Mexico City" (*Poems* 15). Sor Juana deeply understood the weight of her female body and its consequences on her studies and the pursuit of knowledge. She became a rebel against the surrounding patriarchal society and its rules.

She incarnated a different type of woman who opposed to the "conformed" woman of that time (male-dominated from her mind to her body). She was a woman-monster, a monstrosity for her time period, not only in the eyes of men, but also in the eyes of the women who conformed to the patriarchal socio-economic structure. Ryan Prendergast explains:

> Consequently, she was given a multitude of epithets that constantly pointed to her departure from a traditional model and highlighted her unique position as a colonial writer. Using words such as "phoenix" and "muse" to describe her in some way points out her difference, her monstrosity, for she is not a traditional female subject of Baroque New Spain. (30)

Through her writings and the way she lived her life, Sor Juana tried to build her own peculiar personality and identity by distancing herself from the normalized (married) and marginal woman (the religious woman and the courtesan/prostitute) of her times. Sor Juana represented a monstrous woman that rose and lived in her writings; a third woman who established herself between the domestic wife and the religious woman, between the angel and the prostitute, in a literary liminal space.[116] She built her own identity outside of the pre-established patriarchal criteria, which represented a dangerous threat for men and, at the same time, a promise of redemption for all those women who suffered social and domestic abuse.

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[116] I will be using Bhabha's term in a non post-colonial sense; I will be modifying Bhabha's "liminal space" to delineate a space of freedom created by women from their marginal position of confinement. My interpretation of the "liminal space" becomes a unique environment in which women start negotiating a new genderless identity within their matriarchal system and an outside patriarchal socio-economic structure. Refer to Chapter One for clarification.

Sor Juana's limitations as a woman became her biggest strength and a tool toward rebellion. Silence was the main characteristic that a woman of good manners had to keep inside the house or convent, and in the streets. According to Fray Luis de Leon in his *La perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*) women should keep silence, because they all have little wisdom and therefore they should make an effort "to be very quiet" (Jones, San José 207).

> Mas, como quiera que sea, es justo que se precisen de callar todas, así aquellas a quien les conviene encubrir su poco saber, como aquellas que pueden sin vergüenza descubrir lo que saben; porque en todas es, no sólo condición agradable, sino virtud debida, el silencio y hablar poco. (Jones, San José 206)
>
> But, in any case, it is right that all women should pride themselves on being silent, both those for whom it is advisable to hide their little knowledge and those who can without any shame reveal what they know, for in all of them silence and saying little are not only a pleasant condition but a required virtue. (Jones, San José 207)

At the beginning of the *Respuesta*, Sor Juana invoked silence to make sure that, by naming it, silence could say what it had to say and, therefore, she, as a woman, could speak through that incarcerating "virtue" and still maintaining her respectable position.

> Perdonad, Señora mía, la digresión que me arrebató la fuerza de la verdad; y si la he de confesar toda, también es buscar refugios para huir la dificultad de responder, y casi me he determinado a dejarlo al silencio; pero como éste 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 proprio oficio: decir nada. (*Poems* 4)
>
> I beg you, lady, to forgive this digression to which I was drawn by the power of truth, and, if I am to confess all the truth, I shall confess that I cast about for some manner by which I may flee the difficulty of a reply, and I was sorely tempted to take refuge in silence. But as silence is a negative thing, though it explains a great deal through the very stress of not explaining, we must assign some meaning to it that we may understand what the silent is intended to say, for if not, silence will say nothing, as that is its very *office*: to say nothing. (*Poems* 5,7)

Sor Juana, not only gave words to silence, but she also transformed the kitchen, the typical place for women, and cooking into an instrument for learning. According to Sor Juana, if some men (like Aristotle) had worked more in the kitchen, like women, they would have learned and written a lot more.

> Pues ¿qué os pudiera contar, Señora, de los secretos naturales que he descubierto estando guisando? Ver que un huevo se une y fríe en la manteca o aceite y, por contrario, se despedaza en el almíbar… Y yo suelo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito. (*Poems* 42)
>
> And what shall I tell you, lady, of the natural secrets I have discovered while cooking? I see that an egg holds together and fries in butter or in oil, but, on the contrary, in syrup shrivels into shreds… And I often say, when

> observing these trivial details: had Aristotle prepared victuals, he would have written more. (*Poems* 43)

In her defensive *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,* Sor Juana used all of her knowledge and androgynous self to fight against the accusations of Sor Filotea. However, she seems to have absorbed the Jesuit's teachings through the male figures around her (Father Nuñez de Miranda, her good friend Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, The Archbishop Father Aguillar y Seijas, and even the Bishop Father Fernández de Santa Cruz) and used these teachings to her advantage. For example, in the *Respuesta* we can see the impact of Loyola's *Exercises*.[117] Sor Juana, like a good Jesuit, knew her enemies and their patriarchal techniques and structures that had kept women away from the light of knowledge.

> Con esto proseguí, dirigiendo siempre, como he dicho, los pasos de mi estudio a la cumbre de la Sagrada Teología; pareciéndome preciso, para llegar a ella, subir por los escalones de la ciencias y artes humanas, porque ¿cómo entenderá el estilo de la Reina de las Ciencias quien aún no sabe el de las ancilas? ¿Cómo sin Lógica sabría yo los métodos generales y particulares con que está escrita la Sagrada Escritura? ¿Cómo sin Retórica entendería sus figuras, tropos y locuciones? ¿Cómo sin Física, tantas cuestiones naturales de las naturalezas de los animales de los sacrificios, donde se simbolizan tantas cosas ya declaradas y otras muchas que hay?...

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[117] Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus (La compañia de Jesus), created a method-treatise of meditation, prayers, and mental exercises called *The Spiritual Exercises* (1548), whose major aim was the development of discernment between good and evil through meditation and practices of the senses that reproduced both worlds. This way, these *Exercises* meant to create a quasi-complete knowledge of the enemy (the devil and its temptations) in order to be able to fight accordingly.

¿Cómo sin Aritmética se podrán entender tantos cómputos de años, de días, de meses, de horas, de hebdómada tan misteriosas como las de Daniel, y otras para cuya inteligencia es de los números? ¿Cómo sin Geometría se podrán medir el Arca del Testamento y la Ciudad Santa de Jerusalén?... Y en fin, ¿cómo el Libro que comprende todos los libros, y la Ciencia en que se incluyen todas las ciencias, para cuya inteligencia todas sirven?... y si esto falta, de nada sirve lo demás. (*Poems* 18, 20).

As so I continued, as I have said, directing the course of my studies toward the peak of Sacred Theology, it seeming necessary to me, in order to scale those heights, to climb the steps of the human sciences and arts; for how could one undertake the study of the Queen of Sciences if first one had not come to know her servants? How, without Logic, could I be apprised of the general and specific way in which the Holy Scripture is written? How, without Rhetoric, could I understand its figures, its tropes, its locutions? How, without Physics, so many innate questions concerning the nature of animals, their sacrifices, wherein exist so many symbols, many already declared, many still to be discovered? ...How, without Arithmetic, could one understand the computations of the years, days, months, hours, those mysterious weeks communicated by Gabriel to Daniel, and other for whose understanding one must know the nature, concordance, and properties of numbers? How, without Geometry, could one measure the Holy Arch of the Covenant and the Holy City of Jerusalem, whose mysterious measures are foursquare in all their dimensions, as well as the

> miraculous proportions of all their parts? … And, finally, in consideration of the Book that comprises all books, and the Science in which all sciences are embraced, and for whose comprehension all sciences serve… and if that be lacking, none of the aforesaid will have been of any purpose. (*Poems* 19, 21)

She knew every book, author, technique, and treatise from before and from her time and used them in order to fight the Bishop of Puebla and his critique of her *persona*. She knew the patriarchal rules under which she was living and, through her writing, she challenged them and skillfully reversed the process. She went from being object (inferior and exploitable by men) to being a complete subject; she emerged from her position of inferiority and "disability" to elevate herself to a position of equality and, eventually, supremacy over the "old" male invincible "self."

Throughout her life and by writing the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, Sor Juana challenged and destabilized the patriarchal gender binaries by creating a new androgynous woman who lived, wrote and acted in a liminal space within the matriarchal society of the convent and the outside patriarchal world. With the power of her writing, she was able to shake the patriarchal social structure that surrounded her *persona* and destabilize the gender identity of her male interlocutor. The Bishop of Puebla likely felt destabilized when facing and interacting with Sor Juana's new androgynous self; he was not able to read through the new complicated gender identity, he felt internally destabilized, and, for this reason, lost his male gender role. In order to write and criticize Sor Juana, he became "Sor Filotea de la Cruz." Fernández de Santa Cruz slowly lost his name, his masculine identity, and his authority, while Sor Juana, from her confined

liminal space, stopped "performing" the encoded patriarchal binary system, rose above it, and flew away like a *rara avis.*

According to Julia Kristeva, patriarchy positioned women in a marginal space to pursue their repression and enhance their submissive role.

> If patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as limit or borderline of that order. From a phallocentric point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos; but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside. Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown. (Moi 167)

Kristeva believed that pushing women to the limit of marginality had enabled male culture to control their nature by sometimes vilifying women as darkness or chaos or elevating them as the representative of a higher nature, Virgins and Mothers of God. I do agree with Kristeva that marginality was created by the patriarchal social system in order to control female sexuality and identity; however, I argue that some women, like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Veronica Franco, in their space of marginality, pushed themselves to a limit position (*liminality*) in which they stopped "performing" the gender roles dictated by patriarchy and created a new *persona* who, with the power of her writing, could destabilize male power and control.

During the summer of 1691, it rained incessantly in the valleys of Mexico and all the crops were ruined while the capital was flooded. From Sigüenza y Góngora we learn that: "No one could enter the city and there was a shortage of coal, firewood, fruit, vegetables, fowl, and all that comes from outside the city" (Paz 438). Also, on August 23 of the same year, there was a solar eclipse that people believed was caused by a malignant influence and that brought a plague of *chahuixtle* weevils which ate maize and wheat. This situation of natural disasters, famine, and consequent revolting among people lasted into 1692 while the institution of the church was gaining its strength back. During this same year, Sor Juana felt the pressure of re-conciliating with her austere confessor, Father Nuñez de Miranda. According to Octavio Paz, he represented the "bridge between her, a misguided nun, and the Church" (446). Her only salvation from the negativity of that period and the growth of power of the Church and the Inquisition was submission. On February 17th, 1694, Sor Juana signed a document: "Docta explicación del misterio, y voto que hizo de defender la Purisima Concepción de Nuestra Señora, la madre Juana Inés de la Cruz" ("Learned Explication of the Mystery, and Vow Made by Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz to defend the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady") (Paz 461). In this document Sor Juana declared to defend the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and to follow it with her own religious life. Later on, on March 5th, she signed another important, yet sad document with her own blood, what is known as the "Protesta:" "Protesta que, rubrigada 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" ("Profession That, Signed with Her Blood, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz Made of Her Faith and Her Love to God, at the Time of

Abandoning Humane Studies in Order, Released Form That Attachment, to Follow the Road of Perfection") (Paz 463). According to Paz, this document did not contain any reference to the study of the humanities, like we see in the title, however, nobody saw the original document. In the first paragraph she reiterated her believe in the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church; in the second, she asked forgiveness for having sinned by calling upon the intercession of the Virgin; finally, the third paragraph reiterated the vow she had made to believe in and defend the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Sor Juana concluded this *Protesta* with: "And as a sign of how greatly I wish to spill my blood in defense of these truths, I sign with it" (Paz 463). During this time, she surrendered all of her books, as well as her scientific and musical instruments to the Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas to be sold and the money to be used to help the poor. Sor Juana lived in complete solitude from her beloved books until 1695 when a terrible epidemic broke out in the convent of San Jerónimo. The death rate was very high and Sor Juana took care of her fellow sisters, demonstrating her charity. She contracted the illness and on April 17th 1695 she died at forty-six years of age.[118]

[118] In the *Los guardaditos de Sor Juana* (1999), Sara Poot Herrera investigates on various writings (letters and poetry) that Sor Juana kept from circulating and did not publish. Some of these writings seemed to have appeared after she signed the *Protesta* as another example of Sor Juana's rejection of patriarchal schemes and rules. The Tenth Muse kept writing even if she promised (and signed with her own blood) in front of the Roman Catholic Church and all of her sisters to abandon any form of humanist studies. Sara Poot Herera, with her book, enlarges the name, works, and studies of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The new discoveries include: an unknown sonnet discovered in 1964; *Enigmas* written for some Portuguese nuns, published in 1968; the so called *Carta de Monterrey* in which Sor Juana decides to end the relation between herself and her Father confessor, Father Nuñez de Miranda (found in 1980); an ending to the theatrical comedy *La segunda Celestina* attributed to Sor Juana (found in 1990); a letter by the *Serafina de Cristo*, also attributed to Sor Juana, found in 1960 and published in 1995; and, finally, another version of the *Protesta de la fe* that Sor Juana seemed to have written in 1694 (published in 1997).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Creation of A New Woman

How can I say it? That we are women from the start.

That we don't have to be turned into women by them,

labeled by them, made holy and profaned by them…

Their properties are our exile.

Their enclosures, the death of our love.

Their words, the gag upon our lips.

– Luce Irigaray

Our message is simple and so clear that it cannot be denied.

Every revolution in the history of the world,

every movement for equality, has stopped short of sexual equality.

After thousand of years, this era has made a start on changing that.

Let us not rest until all of us are free.

– Rosalind Miles

As the twenty-first century moves along, it is hard to remember and envision how only few female's voices and texts were recorded during the Italian Renaissance, Spanish Golden Age, and mostly during the Baroque era of colonial Spanish America. Even the ones that managed to reach our modern times were for years ignored or abandoned by

literary historians and eventually depreciated as marginal, worthless, monotonous second-rate literature. A literature written by women relegated to the "margins of the margins," as Nina Scott points out (xi). Throughout the years, women had to overcome many obstacles to achieve a female consciousness and consequent literary authority, due to the structure of patriarchal institutions and because of women's history of educational deprivation and economical dependence on males. As we have seen in the Chapter One, women had to first overcome their internalized feelings of mental and spiritual inferiority imposed on them by a system of patriarchal hegemony in thought, values, religion, institutions, and economic resources. Women started their consciousness awakening by reinterpreting the biblical texts in a massive feminist critique. They started from defending the image of Eve (the sinner, the woman blamed for the human-kind Fall from the Garden of Eden) by creating their own re-interpretation to the unchangeable patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition. Initially, women's Bible criticism did not alter the patriarchal paradigm, however it helped creating a timeless web of sisterhood[119] among women re-thinking and re-visioning their own history, which allowed individual women "to authorize themselves and in some cases to create important works of lasting impact" (Lerner 275). Creativity, as Gerda Lerner highlights, was the instrument by which these women emancipated themselves intellectually and found their own way to freedom out of the confinements of patriarchy.

During the Italian Renaissance, the Spanish Golden Age, and the Baroque of the Indies (in colonial Spanish America) women were positioned in spaces of confinement decided by the ruling patriarchal social system, should have it been marriage, a convent,

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[119] Refer to note 26 in Chapter One.

or a brothel/street (also a Patrician house in the context of fifteen-hundred Republic of Venice). In these spaces of confinement, few intellectual women found their "Room of One's Own[120]" and, by using their literary creativity, pushed themselves to the limit and created a liminal space of freedom. In this space of *liminality*,[121] they generated a new woman who did not conform to patriarchal rules and, therefore, was able to destabilize the surrounding patriarchal gender binaries, identities, and rules.

How did these women managed to create their rooms "of One's Own"? – A concept that Virginia Woolf will explain in her homonymous book at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Were they able to achieve it on their own or they relied on the help of a male figure? After all, *Mulieres in Eclesiis taceant*, *Mulier in silentio discat*, and *Mulieres in Eclesia taceant*,[122] according to various Bible verses echoed in Sor Juana's *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (Arenal, Powell 88). As we have seen in the previous chapters of this book, Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are two of these exceptional women who used their literary creativity and inclination to find their space of freedom in the confinement of their female marginalization. Franco, a Venetian courtesan of the sixteenth century, and Sor Juana, a religious criolla-woman of the seventeenth-century colonial New Spain were able to push themselves to the limit of their matriarchal confinement and create a liminal space of literary freedom in which they did not perform the patriarchal fixed gender roles and they could fluidly move from their matriarchal environment into the outside patriarchal system. They both generated, through their

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[120] Refer to note 24 in Chapter One

[121] Refer to page 55 in Chapter One.

[122] "Let women keep silence in churches," "Let the woman learn in silence," and Let women keep silence in the humanities" (*Eclesia* meaning the universities and the study of humanities). (*The Answer/La Respuesta* 89-90)

writings and literary techniques, a new type of woman/creature to the eyes of their male interlocutors that managed to destabilize the patriarchal gender-binaries structure and, eventually, defend and redeem the image of women.

Veronica Franco (1546-91) was a *cortigiana onesta* (an "honored courtesan"), one of the most ambitious and talented professionals who inhabited at the margins of high society from the late fifteenth century into the Baroque period. As Fiora A. Bassanese reminds us in her critical essay, "Such 'honored courtesans' were far more than prostitutes: their role was to beguile and entertain as well as service" (43). The successful courtesan created a persona that fulfilled not only social and aesthetic expectations, normally reserved for aristocratic women, but also she was allowed a strong erotic expression. Veronica Franco entered the courtesan profession at a very young age under the instructions of her mother, Paola Fracassa. Both women were listed in the important *Catalogue of All the Principal and Most Honored Courtesans of Venice* (1565), which only listed the names, addresses, and fees of well-known prostitutes in the Serenissima.[123] Becoming a courtesan in sixteenth-century Venice was a "mestiere" (craft/profession) that was passed from women to women in a continuous generational matriarchal order, which also created a web of female relations. This way, Veronica Franco was initiated into a new sub-society at the margins ruled by matriarchal rules and regulations. In this new female territory, she was able to separate herself from other courtesans and, while exchanging verses and letters with the outside patriarchal order, find her freedom in the space of *liminality*. She soon became one of the most famous courtesans and poets of Sixteenth-century Venice, who not only had to survive, but also succeeded in a society

[123] Serenissima is another name for the Republic of Venice.

dominated by men. Veronica Franco used her body of a courtesan as a tool to convert her confinement into a space of freedom and eventually of female power. Franco's literary work can only be read as strictly connected, in a cause-and-effect relation, to her profession as an honored courtesan. Benedetto Croce in his *Lettere* affirmed that Veronica Franco's published poems and letters, as mere autobiographical records, reflected the confession of a repented Magdalene. However, in Chapter Two, I have argued that, through her writings, Veronica challenged and subverted the patriarchal system of gender binaries dictated to control feminine sexuality in a male-made society. Veronica Franco's poems and letters are exquisite examples of resistance and subversion of the patriarchal system of control, as seen in Chapter three. In her *capitoli*, she used her body-weight as a woman and a courtesan to mirror the geographical body of the Republic of Venice in order to give herself both power and social status. Also, she redefined the male humanist category of *virtù* as a woman intellectual's integrity. She focused the attention on the way she acquired intellectual, and not mercenary, capital by dissociating it from the selling of one's body for strictly financial gain.

> The honest courtesan's capital, Franco reminds her male interlocutor and reader, is acquired by "honest" means alone, that is, through intellectual and literary projects. Because the Venetian honest courtesan often lived outside the strictly defined marital relations that severely limited the economic and social freedoms of aristocratic women in Italy, she had, in theory at least, the opportunity to manage her own capital. (Rosenthal 6)

For this reason, she, as a courtesan, had part of the agency that money could provide to women at that time. Her body and her body-weight as an honored courtesan are the center

of her writing as a strong technique used by Veronica Franco to create a tool of resistance against a state of female marginality, inferiority and, at times, of inexistence. She found in her marginality and consequential liminal space, not only a space of intellectual freedom, but also a location in which the gender lines proposed and followed by the patriarchal socio-economical system were dismantled. Therefore, in this liminal space, Veronica Franco will find her freedom and power and, through her writing, destabilize the gender identity and authority of Maffio Venier, her male interlocutor. Maffio Venier slowly loses his gender identity by interacting with Veronica and her literary technique. From her liminal space and through her literary activity, Franco advanced in the Venetian society and actively participated in intellectual milieus in a society in which other women were restricted and confined to domestic services (with the exception of aristocratic women who could be more involved in the society under the supervision of their husbands or a male figure). Veronica Franco was able to become a public figure, publish her work, and enter prestigious literary circles by using her own body to create a web of connections with political leaders and intellectuals who will see her as a reflection of the Republic of Venice.

Similarly, a hundred years later in Colonial Mexico, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz challenged her own confinement as a religious woman and found the same freedom and power in the liminal space between the outside patriarchal order (based upon the rules and regulations of the Old World) and the inside matriarchal order created from women and for women. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was considered the greatest poet of Colonial New Spain born either in 1648 or 1651 (most scholars prefer the latter date) in the valley of Nepantla from a mother that was a *criolla*. After many years in the court, she decided

to enter the convent because the marriage life did not completely agree with her *persona*, as she recalls in the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (1700 – *The Answer to Sor Filotea de la Cruz*):

> 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 materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación; a cuyo primer respeto (como al fin más importante) cedieron y sujetaron la cerviz todas las impertinencillas 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. (*Poems* 14,16)
>
> And so I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions (I refer to superficial, and not fundamental, regards) most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, I deemed convent life the least unsuitable and the most honorable I could elect if I were to insure my salvation. Working against that end, first (as, finally the most important) was the matter of all the trivial aspects of mu nature that nourished my pride, such as wishing to live alone, and wishing to have no obligatory occupation that would inhibit the freedom of mi

studies, nor the sounds of a community that would intrude upon the peaceful silence of my books. (*Poems* 15,17)

Sor Juana decided to enter the confinement of the convent in order to "ensure" her salvation, which excluded marriage life and included the company of her beloved books. She realized at a young age that she could have not feed her "negra inclinación" (dark inclination) in the patriarchal order of the court; therefore, she pushed herself to the margins and entered the convent of San Jerónimo. Convents were little sub-societies at the limit/margin of the patriarchal order, but regulated by a matriarchal order as the laws inside the convent were decided by women and for women. In the isolation of the convent and under the incognito of the religious habit, she was able to free her sexless soul in a desperate search for knowledge. In the "Respuesta a un caballero de Perú" ("Answer To a Gentleman From Perú"), Sor Juana answers the gentleman who accuses her to be a man by they way she writes by affirming that her decision to enter the convent was the fact that, due to the religious habit and confinement, nobody could verify if she was a man or a woman.

Yo no entiendo de esas cosas;
sólo sé que aquí me vine
porque, si es que soy mujer,
ninguno lo verifique.

(*Poems* 140)

I have no knowledge of these things,
except that I came to this place
so that, if true that I am a female,
none substantiate that state.

(*Poems* 141)

Similarly to Veronica Franco before her, Sor Juana pushed her body to a liminal space between the matriarchal order of the convent and the outside patriarchal order; a space of *liminality* in which the line between gender roles and identities was neutralized. Sor Juana thought, wrote, and create from this liminal space by using the technique of androgyny to convey the fact that one's soul is sexless and that also a female body could achieve that so longed knowledge. As we have seen in Chapter One, Hélène Cixous affirms that women are "bisexual" beings who are able to maintain both genders and let them coexist without the necessity of eliminating one or the other (as it happens in male beings). Therefore, Sor Juana believed in this coexistence of both genders in her *persona*, reflected it in her writings, and used it against the patriarchal system who tried many times to silence her "negra inclinación" (dark inclination).

From her liminal space, Sor Juana was also able to create a web of relations outside of the convent with the two *Virreinas* of her time (Leonor Carreto and María Luisa Manrique de Lara) and the respective husbands and court members. These relations were not only fruitful for her genius (the second *Virreina*, María Luisa, will bring Sor Juana's manuscripts to Spain and publish all her work overseas), but also very important for her protection from the *panopticon*[124] of the church and the growing power of the inquisition. From the protection of her liminal space, Sor Juana escaped not only the inquisition and the patriarchal rules inside and outside the convent, but also the matriarchal rules, which, at the end of her life, asked her to donate all her scientific instruments and stop writing. Sor Juana survived the matriarchal sub-society of her convent from her liminal space, while avoiding performing the patriarchal gender roles.

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[124] Refer to pages 40-42 of Chapter One.

Most of her writings focused on the image of androgyny, which allowed Sor Juana to gain enough power to destabilize the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, and, with him, the *panopticon* institution of the Church. Talking from a liminal space and being a liminal female creature, just like Veronica Franco in her courtesan's environment, Sor Juana was able to destabilize the patriarchal social order of gender binaries while interacting with the Bishop of Puebla. Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz felt destabilized while communicating and exchanging letters with Sor Juana because the gender lines/identities dictated by the patriarchal order were blurred and lost their meaning in the liminal space. For this reason, the Bishop of Puebla slowly loses his fixed gender identity and becomes Sor Filotea de la Cruz, another religious woman, while interacting with Sor Juana. Therefore, from the confinement of her convent, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, thorough her writings and her liminal *persona*, managed to free her sexless soul towards the light of knowledge while blurring and destabilizing the patriarchal gender lines/identities, which aimed to trap women into a space of inferiority and inexistence.

Moreover, she signed the *Protesta*[125] with her own blood, asserting to abandon her writing, her "negra inclinación), and finally devote herself to God and prayers that would lead her to perfection. By being a liminal creature, Sor Juana signed the *Protesta*, but did not perform its laws and requirements. As Sara Poot Herrera states in her book *Los guardaditos de Sor Juana* (1999), Sor Juana did not uncover all of her writings and did not stop producing after the infamous blood signature of the *Protesta*. Poot Herrera calls "guardaditos" (thimbles) the hidden writings that Sor Juana was not ready or did not

125 "Protesta que, rubrigada 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" ("Pofession That, Signed with Her Blood, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz Made of Her Faith and Her Love to God, at the Time of Abandoning Humane Studies in Order, Released Form That Attachment, to Follow the Road of Perfection") (Paz 463).

want to make public: a sonnet unknown until 1964, some *Enigmas* for the Portuguese nuns (published din 1968), the so-called *Carta de Monterrey* (signed in 1980) with which Sor Juana dismissed her confessor father Nuñez de Miranda, a finale to *The Second Celestina* of 1690 attributed to Sor Juana, a letter called *Carta de Serafina de Cristo* discovered in 1960 but published in 1995, and, finally, a new version of the *Protesta* that seemed to be edited by Sor Juana in 1694, a year before her death. Sor Juana, throughout her life, not only did not perform the patriarchal gender role assigned to her, but also did not perform her duties as a religious woman. She wanted to write and so she did… until the last day of her life by challenging and subverting her new restrictions dictated by her superiors. Sor Juana seems to personify the modern theory of Luce Irigaray on the fluidity of female language.

> Fluid –like that other, inside/outside of philosophical discourse –is, by nature, unstable. Unless it is subordinated to geometrism, or (?) idealized… Woman never speaks the same way. What she emits is flowing, fluctuating. Blurring. And she is not listened to, unless proper meaning (meaning of the proper) is lost. Whence the resistance to that voice that overflows the "subject." Which the subject then congeals, freezes, in its categories until it paralyzes the voice in its flow. (113)

She had to become an unstable woman, genderless, just like fluid, to be able to escape the patriarchal hegemony system that wanted to put an end to her brave voice and eternally silence her. She had to come out of the patriarchal gender norms and "overflow" her female religious-social "subject" in order to be able to disregard the new rules imposed on her in the *Protesta*, resist, listen to her *negra inclinación*, and write until the end of her

days. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz died at the age of forty-six in the convent of San Jerónimo due to a terrible epidemic that broke out in Mexico between 1694 and 1695.

In conclusion, Veronica Franco in her patrician confinement as a courtesan and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz from the four walls of the convent of San Jerónimo pushed themselves to the limit of their respective matriarchal societies and create a liminal space, a "room of one's own," in which they found their intellectual freedom and female power. In the liminal space, both women through their writings rejected the fixed female gender role dictated by the outside patriarchal order and decided not to perform its norm. Therefore, their respective confinement (the patrician house/the brothel and the convent) became a place of intellectual *autoritas* in which the body and the gender binaries were blurred, while the sexless mind/soul could keep its journey toward knowledge and literary freedom. Through their writings, both Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were able to create a liminal creature between the domestic wife and the religious woman, between the angel and the prostitute; a "monster" woman who built her own identity outside of the pre-established patriarchal gender lines and represented a dangerous threat for men, yet a promise of redemption for future women. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz were able, from their liminal space, to destabilize their respective male interlocutors (Maffio Venier and the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz) and blur their fixed gender identities. Both men found themselves confused and destabilized when interacting with two women who did not follow and perform the female gender role constructed by the patriarchal order and to which they were accustomed. For this reason, they started losing their respective gender identities by slowly melting into the "incerto autore" (the unknown author) and Sor

Filotea de la Cruz. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz found in their confinements a place of freedom in which they could rise and freely use their pen as a tool to challenge, attack, and eventually destabilize the outside patriarchal social order by transforming their *personae* from passive objects of exchange in a male-system, to active subjects in a female giving-receiving liminal system.

This book is only the beginning of a bigger project that I would like to undertake in the next years. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz are two of many female writers and artists who are part of that timeless web of sisterhood that new feminists celebrate (Cixous, Daly etc.) and that bell hooks hates and criticizes.[126] What is the impact of Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in today's world? From their literary letters, poems, and works we can recognize similar necessities and fears to the ones that women suffer in our modern times not only in Mexico, Latin America, and Italy, but also in the United States of America (such as the rape culture in colleges, sexual harassment at work and in public places, and, last but not least, domestic and non-domestic violence). Women have been depicted as inferior, not allowed to pursue an education, and mistreated by their male counterparts from ancient times to today. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana's words have been changing over the years and took different art forms, yet they still remain strong. Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz seem to have a strong reverberation in today's culture, sub-culture, and pop-culture that creates a web of connections between women in different spaces, cultures, and times.

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[126] The vision of sisterhood envisioned and evoked by modern feminists and liberationists was based on the idea of a common female oppression. According to bell hooks a sense of sisterhood and the concept of common oppression are both false, due to the fact that women are different in nature and social reality. "Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices" (hooks 44).

For this reason, I would also like to expand my research and see if other women writers and artists did approach literary or artistic production the same way. Were there other women who pushed themselves to the limit of their respective societies by creating a liminal space of artistic freedom in which and they were able to destabilize, through their works of art, the patriarchal gender binaries and social order? As I explained in Chapter One, the "sisterhood" that I am envisioning in my dissertation is a system of literary "giving and receiving" among women in different times and spaces that, little by little changed the world patriarchal binary conception of women as Virgin Maries or Medusas. For this reason, in my future research, I would like to extend the connection between Veronica Franco and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by threading a relation to other women writers and artists (of Early Modern and contemporary times) who engage in the same treatment of art as a tool towards a self-liberation, self-authorization, and self-(re)appropriation.

Woman *is* and *makes* history.

– Mary Ritter Beard

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