

SEIZING THE GAZE: THE *CARPE DIEM* TOPOS
IN SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ'S
"A SU RETRATO"

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My first serious encounter with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz occurred in college, when I took a seminar dedicated solely to her work. My professor, a renowned scholar of colonial literature, was an ardent admirer of Sor Juana and her work. On the first day of class, he invoked Sor Juana's name with the epithet that would be repeated continuously throughout the semester: "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a beautiful woman." Among the most memorable classes of the term was one in which we discussed the sonnet I will be examining in this study, "A su retrato." One of her most well-known works, "A su retrato," reads, at first glance, as a masterful but conventional development of the Baroque theme of *desengaño*. Written as a response to her portrait, the poem warns the reader against the deceptiveness of appearances by underscoring the discrepancy between the representative object (the painting) and the subject of representation (the person portrayed). In a conventional gesture of literary homage, Sor Juana adapts the final verse of Luis de Góngora's famous *carpe diem* sonnet to her own last line, a dramatically stark move that closes the poem with the finality of a tombstone being rolled into place.

By way of beginning the class, my professor ordered us, first, to look at a facsimile of the portrait included in the edition we were using. Then, with his typical sermonic gravity, he began to read the sonnet out loud.

Este, que ves, engaño colorido,
que del arte ostentando los primores,
con falsos silogismos de colores
es cauteloso engaño del sentido;
éste, en quien la lisonja ha pretendido
excusar de los años los horrores,
y venciendo del tiempo los rigores
triunfar de la vejez y del olvido:
es un vano artificio del cuidado,
es una flor al viento delicada,
es un resguardo inútil para el hado;

es una necia diligencia errada,
 es un afán caduco y, bien mirado,
 es cadáver, es polvo, es sombra, es nada. (90)

His voice rose through the cuatrains, inflecting each line with a compelling, but confusing, mixture of literary admiration and spiritual enchantment. Being extremely myopic, he had to hunch over the text in an awkward embrace as large drops of perspiration gathered on his face. In that moment, he seemed to be weathering a storm of his own, private passion, completely unaware of us, his students, who did not know what to think of this oddly intimate moment of textual exegesis.

When he reached the final verse, which resoundingly concludes that her portrait is a corpse that will finally and inevitably dissolve into dust, shadow and nothingness, his voice slowed down dramatically, became barely more than a whisper, as he descended the rhetorical ladder of Sor Juana's seemingly heartless gesture of self-erasure. Despite the fact that he had probably read this sonnet hundreds of times before, the last verse seemed to catch him by surprise. He had failed to hold onto the elusive object of his desire, and his disillusion and disappointment were immediate and real. Sor Juana had out-smarted him once again.

I recount this anecdote not because it is exceptional, but rather because it typifies how Sor Juana was, and continues to be, viewed as an anomaly—an incongruous sign whose deviation from a predominantly masculine cultural and ideological order incites both admiration and anxiety. In my professor's impassioned reaction to the elusiveness of the poem and his somewhat desperate insistence that we look at the portrait, this conflict becomes apparent. His admiration for her art is undercut by his desire to continue seeing her as a woman, one who can be possessed for as long as the viewer of the portrait can hold the gaze on her image.

In a sense, my professor's near-sightedness is symptomatic of a larger, cultural myopia. This unwillingness or inability to appreciate Sor Juana as an accomplished writer of prodigious intellect, who is also a woman, exemplifies much of the Sor Juana criticism written by my professor's contemporaries. Attempting to classify her within conventional gender paradigms, while evaluating her work against dominant (masculinist) literary traditions, they tend to feminize, domesticate, romanticize, or pathologize her artistic genius.¹ More recently, in his article, "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Reads Her Portrait," William Clamurro interprets the nun's use of the Gongorine verse as an anxious attempt to legitimize her place within the Spanish literary tradition.

Sor Juana's allusion to Góngora represents . . . an attempt to connect to that literary tradition in the closest way, as the Mexican woman poet in effect "inscribes" her text into Góngora's. The allusive gesture thus becomes a kind of effacement. Perhaps, the most interesting problem of poetic voice, then, is Sor Juana's willingness to give up her own voice to Góngora's as the attempt to place herself solidly in the poetic tradition of the Spanish Baroque further undermines the autonomy and poetic authority of her own text. (38-39)

Although elsewhere in the article Clamurro briefly recognizes the marginal status of women writers in a patriarchal culture, he subordinates that issue to the larger question of the cultural identity of the *criollo*, and, in the process, exposes his own masculinist assumptions. For to conclude that Sor Juana, in her allusion to Góngora, sabotages her own poetic authority by consciously relinquishing her voice to his both underestimates the nun's critical awareness of her fraught status as a woman writer, and undermines her agency in the strategic formation of a legitimate subject position.

The proliferation of gender-inflected perspectives points out that literary criticism, like any discipline which stakes a claim in the cultural enterprise of owning knowledge, is an ideologically encoded act, which necessarily seeks to establish and maintain its own authority. Such critical tendencies, however, involve a process of objectification which, in the case of Sor Juana criticism, "contrives a mask or metaphor for Sor Juana" (Merrim 18). In other words, Sor Juana is conceptualized as a screen, in both senses of the word: a framed, yet blank, space for the projection of assumed truths and unexamined assumptions about women and authorship/authority, as well as a barrier which obscures the perceived, and hence, threatening, incongruity of an intelligent woman capable of competing with, and even surpassing, her male contemporaries.

In her own time, Sor Juana was an equally anomalous figure, regarded both as a *monstruo de la naturaleza*, and, like her counterpart in the British colonies, Anne Bradstreet, a Tenth Muse. Both terms denote categorical excess to the extent that they evoke the Baroque admiration for the extraordinary, the marvelous and the hyperbolically intensified. But if all classification is an attempt to contain, through naming and defining the perceived differences in the natural, social and political orders (a major scientific project of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the discovery of the New World), the construction of these "super" categories also suggests that Sor Juana did not quite fit into existing categories of the natural or literary order. Her intellect and writing made her more than a "woman," and her inherent "womanhood" made her less than a "writer."

The anxiety produced by Sor Juana's paradoxical status appears

explicitly in a seventeenth-century literary history from the "New World." In the chapter titled "Concerning the woman *or* poet called Tenth Muse and the many commodities of this kind which exist in the New World,"² the hypothetical author defines the Tenth Muse as "a kind of commodity *or* woman who may be found in New England as well as New Spain." He then explains that he has moved his discussion of the Tenth Muse from the chapter on men to the chapter on women because "many men do not know how to determine if she is a woman *or* a poet and they treat her as a neutral thing, thinking of her both as a woman *and* a poet." To this he adds a cautionary note that "readers should not confuse the categories women *and* poets, as many others have done" (Jed 207, emphasis mine).³

The interesting alternation of conjunctions "and," "or," which link, in a variety of binary relationships, the categories of woman, poet, commodity, is confusing. As the old Clairol hair-coloring commercial goes, "Is she or isn't she?"; only here, one must ask, "What is she or what isn't she?" Although this author clearly acknowledges the existence of the writing-woman phenomenon, he cannot allow the term "woman poet" (without the intervening conjunctions) to stand as a category in itself. The claimed intent to avoid confusion between categories by placing the discussion of Tenth Muses in the chapter on women obscures a deeper fear of contamination. The construction of a new category, Tenth Muse, recognizes the singularity of such women, while containing them, as a subspecies, within the larger, and uniformly "inferior" genus of women. The threatening excess of an intellectually productive woman is thus reduced to oddity, to an exceptional yet "unnatural" specimen, neatly packaged for curious observers and cultural carpet-baggers. Within this taxonomy of gender the poet's subjectivity is subsumed as female genius disappears behind female genus.

Portraits, like epistemological categories, also function as a mechanism of containment to the extent that they frame and "capture" the subject in a specific moment—a moment interpreted, and rendered visible, by the gaze of the artist. In this sense, painting portraits is an artistic act that quite literally fulfills the classical *carpe diem* prescription. To immortalize the subject through visual image is to seize the day and never let go. But who is "seizing," and what exactly is being "seized"? While Sor Juana's portrait was most likely commissioned by her male superiors, or one of her aristocratic patrons, in an ostensible act of homage and respect, the painted portrayal of exceptional women, like their recorded classification discussed above, served equally to reinscribe them within the "natural," social order which their intellectual excess had disrupted. In her discussion of seventeenth-century cultural anxiety toward Sor Juana and her work, Margo Glantz notes:

[U]na monja-poeta es un artefacto sorprendente pero peligroso; bien clasificada, puede controlarse su productividad, inscribirse en una sección especial, una galería de retratos en donde las mujeres ocupan el lugar que les corresponde como modelos de la imitación; se completa así una taxonomía sobre lo femenino que tranquiliza a sus detractores y, de paso, protege a las mujeres. (xii)⁴

Considering the predominant masculine cultural hegemony of Sor Juana's day, and the particular position she occupied within it as both revered curiosity and threatening anomaly, we might wonder how Sor Juana herself viewed the portrait in terms of its objectification of her person? In other words, to what extent does the painted image transform and polarize perceptions of the nun from *monstruo de la naturaleza* to *naturaleza muerta*, from a living representative of female intellect and voice to a lifeless, (albeit more enduring) representation of female purity and silence? Moreover, with respect to her allusion to Góngora's *carpe diem* poem, to what extent might Sor Juana be responding critically to conventional artistic representations of women established by dominant, masculine, literary discourse? That such representations were problematic to and problematized by Sor Juana, is the underlying assertion of my reading of her sonnet "A su retrato." By reading her sonnet within two Renaissance literary traditions, the *blasón* and the *carpe diem* topos, I argue that Sor Juana both modifies and responds to the gendered foundations upon which those traditions are constructed.

The *blasón*, a type of verbal portrait in verse, derives, in part, from the ancient rhetorical tradition of the *descriptio personarum*, which operates on the belief in the superiority of language over the visual arts to encompass both the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of the portrayed subject. The Renaissance debate concerning the impossibility of visually representing perfect beauty begins with Petrarch, and is developed well into the sixteenth century.⁵ In Bembo's sonnet 20 of his *Rime*, a *blasón* written in response to Giovanni Bellini's portrait of his beloved, the poet deliberately out-does the painter's representation by emphasizing all those qualities of his lady that cannot be communicated in the voiceless, still-life visual image. In the description of her "inner" attributes (her judgment, value, beauty, nature, etc.), the poetic voice, in a sense, speaks for the absent subject, filling the gap between the beloved and the insufficiency of the painter's image. The issue at stake, however, is not so much the perfect representation of his beloved, but rather the possibility of perfect representation itself.⁶ In her discussion of Renaissance portraiture, Elizabeth Cropper observes that "the painting of a beautiful woman, like lyric poetry, may become its own object, the subject being necessarily absent" (179). In other words, the dis-

inction between representations of beauty and the beauty represented are elided—the question of the woman's identity becomes immaterial as her physical appearance becomes the screen onto which are projected both the idealized and ideologically inflected conceptions of female beauty in a debate about the very possibility of representing beauty.⁷

Within the context of Renaissance theories of literary and visual portraiture, Sor Juana's sonnet can be seen as a critical response to the "necessarily absent" subject.⁸ In this sense, the poem becomes the medium whereby the visual artifact "speaks," giving voice to the silent, "still life" image of the painting. Read in conjunction with the portrait, the poetic voice of the sonnet overflows the frame of the painting which seeks to contain her. As such a response, what the poetic voice says, and what the poem does rhetorically, is to critique and subvert certain cultural assumptions about female beauty and the female body implicit in the largely masculinist, literary and artistic tradition of the Spanish Golden Age.

The anaphora of the demonstrative pronoun *éste* which initiates both quartets invokes the absent object—the portrait—even as it fails to directly name that object. Rather than fulfill the readers' expectation of a literary portrait, the poetic voice undermines it, building instead a kind of literary anti-portrait by withholding any concrete, visual imagery in the description which follows. Refusing to follow the rhetorical formula of the literary portrait which typically combines the visible, physical attributes of the female subject with her invisible spiritual qualities, the poetic voice unravels a chain of conceptual images ("engaño colorido", "cauteloso engaño del sentido," etc.) that displaces the visual image to which it refers, ostensibly focusing on the deceptive quality of art. Yet, the reference in the initial verse to the second person addressee *tú*, who rhetorically "sees" or "views" the portrait, points to the other side of the aesthetic experience—namely, the potentially deceptive perception of the eye of the beholder. By identifying her implicit reader as an imaginary viewer, the poetic voice, according to Emilie Bergmann, "deflects the possessive gaze from her own image, and . . . turns a mirror toward the male observer" (166). Rather than conclude, however, as Bergmann does, that such an inversion allows the lyric voice to contemplate "the voyeur in her mirror" (166), I would suggest that it undermines the very notion of "seeing" all together. For even as the poetic voice invites her reader to identify with the imaginary spectator whom she addresses, what the reader "sees" is nothing but the words on the page. By not fulfilling the generic expectations of verbal portraiture, Sor Juana, in this masterful rhetorical move, also fails to mirror gendered cultural assumptions about the intrinsic and extrinsic value assigned to female beauty. More than a mere deflection of the gaze, her rhetorical brilliance constitutes a disruption of that gaze. In short, Sor Juana

breaks the cultural mirror, and creates a visual void, one that “disappears” both the object viewed and the viewer. As a result, she collapses the tension between spectator and object, between male and female—that tension necessary to hold such categories in place. It is from within this constructed rhetorical site of non-discrete epistemological and ontological spaces that the poetic voice speaks and is able to remain genderless and disembodied, eluding, in a sense, the readers’ desire to attach the poet herself to the poetic voice she creates.

Sor Juana’s strategic configuration of her poetic voice as a means of countering the cultural myopia that both sees and seizes the female body in highly objectified and idealized visual and literary representations also informs my reading of her incorporation of the final line of Góngora’s *carpe diem* poem. In response to Clamurro’s claim that the nun’s allusive gesture constitutes an act of self-effacement,⁹ I would proffer a counter reading, informed, in part, by Barbara Johnson’s distinctions between *source studies*, which is often defined in terms of borrowing property, and *intertextuality*, which is often defined in terms of “misreading, or infiltration, that is, of violations of property” (264). Bearing this distinction in mind, Sor Juana’s intertextual inscription of the Gongorine line can be seen as an act both of poetic one-up(wo)manship and of theft. It is not just the verse that she steals; however, but also the entire conceptual construct that the verse upholds. For by “seizing” the Gongorine verse in an act of “ventriloquistic appropriation” (Harvey 121),⁹ Sor Juana destabilizes questions of male authorship and ownership, and undermines the culturally inscribed distinctions between origin and imitation.¹⁰ In much the same way that her poetic voice disrupts the cultural gaze upon women, so her appropriation of Góngora’s line intervenes and interrupts the masculinist discourse contained in the literary convention of the *carpe diem* topos.

The topos, which originates with Horace (Bk.I, ode xi), is taken up and reworked by Renaissance poets, who conventionally build their works on a male-speaking voice addressing a female auditor—who is often a virgin reluctant to change her state, and whose ever-aging body often becomes the metaphor for the inevitable destruction of time. Like Garcilaso before him, Góngora follows the Petrarchan tradition, employing the image of the youthful maiden whose exaggerated yet fleeting beauty is developed in the fragmented description of her head and face. The violent hyperbaton, which runs throughout the sonnet, underscores this fragmentation, dispersing the woman’s features across the rhetorical field of the quartets in a series of hyperbolic comparisons of her beauty to nature’s. Such a rhetorical move, like the highly visual imagery employed, is both brilliant and seductive. The fragmented image that emerges seems to beg the intelligent eye of the reader to intervene and reconstruct the elusive

image of the female body, which has been so artfully deconstructed in the cuartets. In this sense, the cognitive gaze of the reader upon the linguistic representation of female beauty is not unlike the spectators identified in the sonnet itself. On the one hand, the gold shining beneath the sun competes with the more brilliant gleam of the maiden's blond hair in the first cuartet, while in the second, the eyes of desirous onlookers would rather "pluck" ("cogello") the red flower of her lips than the flower of the carnation to which they are compared. Thus, even as the speaker exhorts the female auditor to seize the fleeting moment of her youth, a moment temporarily suspended in the adverbial anaphora of "mientras," the internal references of the poem remind her that she is always being watched by both the cultural, masculine gaze which assigns her social value in accordance with her youth and beauty, and by the providential yet jealous gaze of Nature, which will ultimately devalue her in death. In both instances, the female body will be seized, as the tercets are quick to point out.

Following literary convention, the speaker exhorts his female narratee to enjoy her youth, synechdochically signified with her body, and compactly refigured as "cabello, frente, labio, cuello," and two lines later as "oro, lilio, clavel, cristal." In a rhetorical move that both stays and contains those youthful attributes scattered throughout the initial strophes, the poetic voice gathers the fragmented beauty only to reconstruct it into the gradually fading images of "tierra, humo, polvo, sombra, nada," which close the poem. In the same way that the poem points to Nature's ultimate power to give and take back the maiden's beauty, so it also, by way of this rhetorical seizing and erasure, affirms the poet's power to create, control and destroy that same object of beauty. This is not to deny the metaphysical argument of the sonnet concerning the inevitability of death, or that this type of fragmented presence is part of the Petrarchan tradition. Rather, it underscores the fact that such arguments and traditions are often constructed upon gendered metaphors, informed by a series of cultural assumptions regarding women. In this case, the woman's beauty exceeds Nature's, and it is precisely that excess that must be held in check. Since nature is the earthly reflection of providential perfection, female beauty, as a more-than-perfect copy of nature, cannot be allowed to outdo the original, and hence, must be re-mortalized. The paradox is that her initial ascension is effected by male desire, which remains masked or sublimated by the chimerical images of the cuartets, and the metaphysical finality of the tercets.¹¹

In contrast to Góngora's highly visual, and syntactically dazzling sonnet, Sor Juana's seems both bleak, in its absence of visual imagery, and plain, in the relative simplicity and directness of its language. Yet read in conjunction with Góngora's poem, the lack of visual and rhetorical adorn-

ment suggests not only the obvious warning against the deceptive qualities of art and artifice, but also a critique of the artistic traditions which figure the female body as a screen for cultural projections. Thus, it is not just the object, the portrait, or the poem, which she decries, but, more importantly, the violence of representation by which such art objects are created.

As a response to Góngora's poem, Sor Juana's sonnet brings to the surface those underlying mechanisms of representation necessary to his expression of the *carpe diem* theme. Her reference in the first quatet to the painting's primary weapon of deception, the "*falsos silogismos de colores*," explicitly raises the issue of the relationship between verbal and visual representation. Painted images like rhetorical adornment can lead to false logic, and illusory conclusions. In this case, might Sor Juana not be refuting a false line of argumentation which, within the Renaissance theories of literary and visual portraiture discussed earlier, could syllogistically posit something like this: Beauty is woman. Woman can be seized. Therefore, Beauty can be seized? The minor premise—that woman is seizable—is absent in the conclusion, yet necessary to legitimate the "truth" of the concluding premise. Thus, in her own subtle move of rhetorical indirection, Sor Juan ironically exposes what such "falsos silogismos" would mask: that the female body, whether visually or literarily invoked, is always object, and hence, infinitely subordinated to a larger masculinist truth.

The beauty of this conceit and Sor Juana's deployment of it here is that even as it points to a disturbing conception of the female body, hers is nowhere in sight. The withholding of any visual signposts which would lead the reader to the imagined destination of his desire—the image of the female body—both undermines reader expectation, and forces him to remain in the present, a present which is emphasized in the tercets with the accumulation of conceptual images that refer to the absent portrait:

es un vano artificio del cuidado,
 es una flor al viento delicado,
 es un resguardo inútil para el hado;
 es una necia diligencia errada,
 es un afán caduco y, bien mirado,
 es cadáver, es polvo, es sombra, es nada.

By fixing time and insisting, through the anaphoric repetition of the verb "es," that death/mortality is an omnitemporal condition, Sor Juana disrupts the tension between present and future upon which the *carpe diem* topos depends. As a result, the urgency of seizing the moment by allowing oneself to be seized, as prescribed by Góngora's speaker, is dramati-

cally undermined in a stark and eternal present that neutralizes the threat behind the exhortation¹² (you can't threaten a woman with the devaluation of old age if she doesn't give currency to the temporal distinction). Moreover, the final verse, which so faithfully echoes Góngora's, must be read within the syntactical context of the entire sonnet. Where the concluding line of Góngora's sonnet operates on the notion of future annihilation, thus negating any cultural value that youthful female beauty might have held, Sor Juana's closing verse completes an assertion about what the portrait *is*. By collapsing the poem into its first and last lines, the idea conveyed would be simply and directly: "This that you see is nothing." By affirming the absence rather than negating the presence of the viewed object (in this case, the visual portrayal of the female body), Sor Juana seizes the entire notion of seizing the day, and subverts it. Neither "see-able" nor "seizable," the female body disappears behind the brilliant conceit, masterfully inverting the culturally encoded significance of the verse in Góngora's poem. And it is precisely through the strategic deployment of her poetic voice in this conceptual affirmation of absence that Sor Juana represents and re-configures the "necessarily absent female subject" of artistic representations of women. As a result, female genius reemerges from the representational confines of female genius that seek to contain women in the name of art.

Returning momentarily to Johnson's definition of intertextuality as a "violation of property," we might see Sor Juana's incorporation of Góngora's line, not as an act of self-effacement, as Clamurro suggests, but rather as one of self-assertion. For if the nun is guilty of breaking and entering, of violating the gendered boundaries of sanctified cultural property, she does so only to recuperate what was hers in the first place—namely the right to articulate her own subjectivity. By inscribing Góngora's verse into her own, Sor Juana enacts her own move to counter and contain the cultural assumptions about women within the critical discourse of her own work.

Even as Sor Juana's sonnet invokes the traditional theme of *desengaño*, pointing to the illusory and deceptive qualities of the object of art, she also unmask the hidden, and at times, unconscious desires and assumptions which inform the processes of representation upon which such objects are constructed. This is not to deny that Sor Juana participated in the reigning masculinist literary tradition, but rather to underscore that such participation was not carried out uncritically or unquestioningly from her ambivalent position as a woman writer in colonial Mexico. As Merrim points out, Sor Juana is, in many ways, "a ventriloquist whose voice is, to a significant degree, configured by other voices, other texts" (22). Her allusion to Góngora is a clear example of such ventriloquation, but one which,

read from her peculiar and problematic position as a woman writer, can also be seen as an act of resistance—one which allows her both to acknowledge the largely masculinist tradition in which she participates, but also to “appropriate [or seize] that masculine realm for the feminine” (Merrim 23).

Notes

¹For a more detailed discussion of sexist critical assumptions concerning Sor Juana and her work, see Merrim and Arenal who, along with several other feminist scholars, have modified, contested and revised this largely masculinist corpus of Sor Juana criticism.

²In her discussion of the category of Tenth Muse as part of seventeenth century Europe’s larger project of “constructing the ‘New World’ as a museum” (195), Jed observes: “As the desire to domesticate and appropriate the resources of the New World intensified, Europeans devised new methods to differentiate and rationalize the exotic in accordance with their goal of ruling and commodifying the new lands and peoples. The construction of the category of ‘Tenth Muse’ can be understood in the context of this rationalizing program” (199).

³The passage from which I cite is included in Jed’s article. I assume that, because she does not mention either a title or date of publication for the literary history from which the passage is taken, this bibliographic information is unavailable. In her preface to the passage, Jed states: “In the course of my search to understand the ‘Tenth Muse’ syndrome in relation to colonial epistemologies, I was delighted to come upon the following account of Anne Bradstreet and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in a late seventeenth-century ‘natural’ history from the ‘New World.’ The hypothetical author of this history, perhaps one of Charles II’s correspondents in Mexico City, had some familiarity with these women writers—both published and promoted as ‘Tenth Muses’ in the metropolitan capitals of London and Madrid—and seemed anxious to represent them as potentially useful to culture-brokers at home” (206).

⁴In this same discussion Glantz cites several historical references which point out the custom of the time to adorn rooms of women with portraits of illustrious women as a means of inspiring good conduct. She compares this visual practice to the written convention of listing “*ilustres mujeres*” in books concerning female conduct.

⁵Vickers notes the influence of Petrarch in Renaissance theories of representations of women: “When late Renaissance theorists, poets, and painters represented woman’s body, Petrarch’s verse justified their aesthetic choices . . . The descriptive codes of others, both ancient and contemporaries, were, of course, not ignored, but the ‘scattered rhymes’ undeniably enjoyed a privileged status: they informed the Renaissance norm of a beautiful woman” (265).

⁶With regard to the male-gendered gaze of Renaissance literary portraiture, Bergmann notes: “The traditional medieval *blasón* and, later, the Petrarchan portrait objectify the woman in terms of her physical attributes from head to toe, at-

taching metaphysical attributes through metaphor to each detail of her body but explicitly rejecting any inherent value in the object chosen for contemplation" (163). For a more detailed discussion of classical and medieval antecedents to Renaissance and Baroque literary portraits, and Sor Juana's relationship to that tradition, see Sabat de Rivers.

⁷In her study of feminist theory and Renaissance texts, Harvey corroborates Cropper's observation. Discussing Ovid's reinscription of Sappho (the Tenth Muse in Plato's classification), and the continuation of that tradition in the English Renaissance, she notes: "the production and circulation of poetry depend upon the exchange of female representations, whose sexuality is both guarded and displayed in the contest of male poetic rivalry" (9).

⁸See Luciani for a discussion on Sor Juana's familiarity with art theory.

⁹Although Harvey discusses this process of reinscription in terms of male authors who strategically appropriate female voices as a means of affirming their authorial privilege, a similar strategy can be ascribed to Sor Juana. As a woman writer well-aware of the patriarchal literary tradition in which she writes, her rearticulation of the male poet's voice, a voice that conventionally renders woman mute, constitutes an inversion and a recovery.

¹⁰In her essay on gender subordination and identity, Butler points out the compulsory nature of heterosexuality which sets itself up as origin, identifying "other" configurations of sexuality as "copies" of the original. Given Renaissance hierarchies of gender, which posit man as source and origin of human essence, and woman as an inferior imitation, Sor Juana's appropriation of Góngora's verse inverts that order, calling into question the legitimacy of a naturalized notion of origin.

¹¹See Vickers on the relationship between sublimated male desire and Petrarch's scattered figuring of the female body: "Desire directed in vain at a forbidden, distant goddess is soon sublimated desire that spends itself in song. That song is, in turn, the celebration and the violation of that goddess; it would reproduce her vulnerability; it would re-present her nakedness to a (male) reader who will enter into collusion with, even become, another Actaeon" (274).

¹²See Bergmann and Howe for discussions of this temporal shift in Sor Juana's sonnet.

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