

WOMEN'S WEBS OF DIALOGIC POETRY IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

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“Bárbaro, ignorante! Si lo sabes hacer, hazlos, que no te roba nadie tu caudal; si son buenos los que no son tuyos, y más si son de dama, adóralos y alábalos...”

—María de Zayas¹

Since the publication of anthologies such as Julian Olivares's and Elizabeth S. Boyce's *Tras el espejo la musa escribe* (1993) and Teresa Soufas's *Women's Acts* (1997), women who wrote within the lyrical tradition of Spain's Golden Age have claimed their long-overdue place in both classrooms and literary canons. While it is no secret that male writers dominated the early modern secular literary scene, a definitive body of critical evidence now attests to the presence of many women who left their cultural mark and are only now being rediscovered.²

Nowhere is this revaluation more convincingly argued than in Lisa Vollendorf's *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*. By dismantling the longstanding assumption that women had only two limiting, passive “career” options as they entered adulthood—convent or conjugality—Vollendorf demonstrates that women found ways to intellectually and socially advance even within those two realms. In many cases, this entailed a writing vocation or minimally, a basic desire to write. These writings now demonstrate that these “alternate” livelihoods were tangential to the notion of women's education and women as bearers and disseminators of knowledge as teachers, tutors, or advisers (Vollendorf 190). The possibility that women transmitted an awareness of womanhood through their writing would have been one way for them to engage in meaningful dialogues with their readers.

This hypothesis figures as uncharted critical territory within the context of women's early modern Spanish poetry. What interests me in particular about women's poetic production are those moments of gender-awareness that infiltrate the poetic voice and how that voice attempts to induce dialogue, or, to use Naomi Miller's phrase, "build environments through words" ("Womb" 280) with both male and female readers.³ This type of writing functions by definition as an educational device when it textually moves women from the margin toward the center of contentious, problematic, or prevalent social issues. By expressing their concerns either directly or indirectly in their works, women writers demonstrate an acute awareness regarding the condition of women by turning poetry into a communal forum in which teaching and learning can be realized.⁴ Activities such as these support Inda Phyllis Austern's assertion that women had diverse intellectual and cultural roles in the Early Modern Period (16), which are presently being recognized as valuable historical contributions. Here I explore how educated women writers with access to literary academies or salons interacted with women with informal educations (limited, perhaps, to the domestic realm), those that Merry Weisner deems "astute about the world around them" (145), in order to then weave public and private poetic webs of dialogue. This interdependence shows how noble women provided a representative voice to those informally-instructed women, who in a collaborative manner, in turn frequently served as sources of inspiration and writing material.⁵ Such a synthesis also allows the former to extend these dialogues to their primary audience of male readers and writers, which consequently initiates a perpetual cycle of conceptual exchange between all members of their immediate community.

The women-oriented themes and discourses that characterize a given work today signal many of the underlying social issues of the era as seen through the lens of post-feminism. Because the analysis of language lies at the core of these issues, we can now turn to theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin for a better understanding of the way language works in society and the text, particularly from the perspective of dialogism and heteroglossia. Given that certain poetic discourses or voices functioned as a way to channel women's solitudes, often in relation to their male peers, some of Bakhtin's key ideas, although never

discussed by him in the context of the female voice, allow us to now reexamine texts by women writers in order to better understand how these women used poetry to forge poetic dialogues with their readers.⁶ In the most general sense, women's marginalized status automatically situates their poetry in the middle of an implicit dialogue with their male (poet) counterparts.⁷ Bakhtin's theory, in my estimation, can be a useful tool that works toward affirming that women's writing was, in fact, different from that of men by bringing to the forefront women's voices and creating ongoing exchanges that informed readers about women's concerns, issues, and experiences. It also functions to corroborate what many critics of women's history more recently have proposed: that in fact, sisterhoods did exist among many women, particularly those with a writing inclination. Such female alliances allowed women to depend on each other, seek advice from each other, and learn from each other. Beth Miller explains:

It does appear that certain strong women writers have been able to pass on a special kind of consciousness, a vague term, by which I do not mean to suggest a militant commitment to women's rights [. . .] not anything that leads necessarily to overtly or intentionally feminist poetry, but rather, perhaps, a willingness to write out of one's own experience as a woman. (15)

More recently, critics have taken this idea a step further. Vollendorf, for example, asserts that "women in the early modern period regularly engaged in a broad spectrum of educational activities and . . . received education in more forms than has been previously acknowledged" ("Lives" 175). Vollendorf's finding relates to Teresa Howe's affirmation that women also advocated for the education of other women (xiv). The webs of dialogue that connect women's poetry to women's personal history thus attest to the prevalence and importance of teaching and learning in women's lives.

Kay Halasek's article "Feminism and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading in the Academy" successfully mitigates Bakhtin's oversight of gender within dialogic processes. She remedies Bakhtin's gender blindness by first *reading* Bakhtinian as would a feminist.⁸ Borrowing from critics such as Wayne Booth and Dale Bauer, Halasek further reinscribes Bakhtin for feminist consumption by reconfiguring his notion of

centripetal and centrifugal forces. Bakhtin identifies centralizing (unifying) and decentralizing (disunifying) phenomena within a language system as the intersection between a particular speech act and heteroglossia, respectively (272). He favors and gives priority to these decentralizing forces because they align with the diversity heteroglossia encourages (272). Halasek sees these particular Bakhtinian concepts as potentially useful for feminist ideology because in her opinion, this process of decentralization relates to and emphasizes such feminist concerns as power relations, social and cultural marginalization, and political subversion (65). With this in mind, Halasek deems these centrifugal forces as those that impact the life of the text at its borders where the female reader or writer is found (71). The centrifugal, then, proves fruitful when talking about the gender of writers and readers and allows us to better understand dialogical, female-oriented modes that value “process, conversation, connection, intuition, and disorder.” (71).⁹ In this context, women present themselves as meaning negotiators through their own experience and through that of others, a move that embodies the symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning.¹⁰ It is this sort of implicit instruction that manifests in many of these Early Modern dialogic poems.

The way we interpret texts, however, can be subjective. For example, we have evidence that men in the early modern period viewed women’s writing as threatening. In Bakhtinian terms, this threat can be understood as a poem that posed a (rhetorical) question or approached a particular subject peripheral to women because it figured as an overt display of agency theoretically capable of eliciting a response. During a time in which men prized women for their silence and compliance relating to homosocial bonds the former prescribed, transgressors of that code were vilified.¹¹ One of the more prominent moralists of his time, Juan de Zabaleta, expresses his own outrage toward women who attempt to transcend their expected submissive state.¹² Zabaleta’s collection of moralizing essays *Errores celebrados de la antigüedad* (1653) identifies classical accounts or persons erroneously honored in their own historical context and uses them as examples for celebrating—or not—comparable contemporary issues. In his *Error VIII*, Zabaleta develops a rhetorical discourse that figures as an attack on

poetry in general. While he initially makes references to male poets, Zabaleta's primary agenda is to condemn female poets of his generation whose literary inclinations, according to him, were superfluous and/or a detriment to the moral fabric of society.¹³

Zabaleta's commentary allows the reader to immediately identify what David Hershberg refers to as the "elemento misógeno" that characterizes the author's writings about women (xxiii). Although Howard Bloch explains that misogyny is a way to speak about as opposed to doing something to women, he clarifies that at times "speech can be a form of action" (4). Bloch also stresses the importance of understanding the term within its historical and political context (4). In this way the misogynistic attitudes that plagued the early modern Period now help us understand gender dynamics of the past as extreme social constructions.

Given the date of publication of Zabaleta's work, those implicated would include many of the secular poets included in the Olivares and Boyce anthology, such as María de Zayas, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva, and Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán. Although Zabaleta does not name any of these women, all of them are implicated as they all actively engaged in writing before the mid seventeenth century. An analysis of pertinent, gender-conscious passages from a sampling of these women's lyric poetry suggests both how and why women poets might have disrupted the continuity of male-dominated literary circles. If, according to Vollendorf, women's writing exposed women's issues of the time ("Lives" 58), then their texts were not only a form of self-expression but also inconspicuous didactic apparatus.¹⁴ Their writings, as such, functioned to highlight, denounce, and, even at the most abstract level, correct injustices and inequalities between men and women, an idea that has already been associated with probably the most recognized female writer of her time, María de Zayas. In this way, we can see how the discursive anxiety within Zabaleta's essay *Error VIII* figures exemplarily as what surely represented a prevalent opinion among men and, particularly, moralists of the time period, who considered themselves authority figures and teachers par excellence. This hypothesis is based on what these women wrote about as well as what a writing inclination implied from a male vantage point, namely indulgence and excess. When examined more carefully,

however, this assumption reveals a more powerful truth that, ironically yet advantageously, serves a feminist agenda: women's poetry had the potential to empower women and, by default, destabilize social order.¹⁵ Zabaleta's essay is therefore of critical interest for several reasons: its misogynist attitude toward women writers reveals *ipso facto* a formidable or at least emerging female literary presence during the time period, a fact that sheds a welcome light (see Soufas and Vollendorf) on moralists' (mis)perception of women and their activities. It also allows modern readers to better contextualize the question of gender in the early modern period and, more specifically, to understand why women's cultural production posed a discernable threat to patriarchal society during the first half of seventeenth-century Spain.

Zabaleta's two-page reproach associates poetry, "ocio tan moleador," (42) with words such as "locura" (39) and "desaprovechada fatiga" (42) and deems those who write or read it as "inútiles," (40) "desatentos" (40) and "fuera de sí" (41). Although he speaks in general terms here, Zabaleta specifically targets women throughout the rest of his essay. These types of disparaging remarks, what Charles Lawrence and Mari J. Matsuda qualify as "assaultive speech" (1), are those that "ambush, terrorize, wound, humiliate and degrade" (1).¹⁶ Phrases such as these at once disconcert and resonate because they have direct ties to everyday life and everyday people. Referring to her contributors' essays in her edited volume *Women in the Discourse of Early Modern Spain*, Joan Cammarata explains that the analysis of texts from the time period can "reaffirm the existent ideology about women in texts that align with a symbolic system that contributes directly to the repression of real women" (15).

Zabaleta gradually paves the way for his crowning attack on women poets, which he substantiates in the first sentence of his last long paragraph: "Juntemos, pues, ahora las propiedades de la poesía con los defectos y propensiones de una mujer y veremos lo que resulta. Miedo me da pensarlo" (43). His suggestion, which embodies both ridicule and fear and intimates a clear and present danger, establishes a direct correlation between the vacuity of poetry and womanhood. Zabaleta's anxiety manifests, in part, due to the intellectual threat women writers of the time may have posed. In order to be successful writers, they had to be able, as Vollendorf has suggested, to dominate

the baroque literary style that characterized seventeenth-century literary tendencies ("Lives" 58). By familiarizing themselves with, working within, and perfecting this style, women gained automatic membership, albeit limited, to predominantly masculine literary spheres. Once they were afforded access, their potential as "educators," on everything from love and relationships to philosophy, could flourish. A brief analysis of four poems from three female poets will illustrate my thesis that women's poetic production of the time period was, in the Bakhtinian spirit, often highly dialogic and dangerous because it sought to expose prevalent injustices and inequalities, negotiate meaning from them with their readers, and offer lessons of the heart, mind, and soul.

Catalina Ramírez de Guzmán's poem XIII "Quiera quien quisiere" alerts both women and men to the latter's propensity to treason, ridicule, and deceptiveness. These *seguidillas* reveal compelling nuances, as Ramírez de Guzmán inverts the traditional love plaint by invoking the *querelle des femmes*. Probably the most telling verse of the poem is "Entendidos tengo, / madre, a los hombres" (5-6). The implied reader (her mother) exemplifies the reflective quality of her verses.¹⁷ The poem thus becomes an instrument for educating other women who might not have this same appreciation. At the same time the poem alludes to a previous educational process, either through the poet's or another woman's experience. If the understanding of men is somewhat of an enigma, Ramírez de Guzmán's words will have some influence on all of her readers.

Not only does the poet denounce men and their duplicitous actions (due to their interest during amorous pursuits and disinterest after the conquest), but she also offers a solution so that women can avoid or at least elude men's schemes: "Toque al arma el desprecio / contra los hombres, / porque mueran al yerro / de sus errores" (21-24).¹⁸ This powerful stanza offers a concrete recommendation (that women simply ignore men) while employing a powerful metaphor ("desprecio" as weapon) as well as hyperbaton, which ties in to the baroque style alluded to previously by Vollendorf. The poet thus insinuates that men might, in fact, be this way, but that women have it in their power not only to protect themselves but also theoretically put an end to this type of behavior ("porque mueran al yerro / de sus errores" [23-24]).

Her words stand as a warning to all women who find themselves in undesirable or one-sided relationships (“yo no quiero / que un amor se me pague / con unos celos” [2-4]) and equate the men who finagle these types of affairs with cheating card players: “Todas las mujeres / vivan alerta / que las ganen fulleros / con cartas hechas” (25-28).

Ramírez ends the poem by reiterating men’s reproachable ways and indirectly, reiterating how women suffer as a result. Although the notion of dialogue in the strictest sense is absent from the poem, the fact that the poetic voice “converses” with both an implied and unimplied reader suggests that the poet intends for her reader to ponder, learn from, and maybe even react to the situation she presents, which demonstrates Bakhtin’s assertion that “The living utterance...cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue” (276). In other words, while the poem stands to represent one particular case of infidelity and emotional treason, its meaning extends to and permeates the social realm where heteroglossia thrives amidst others with similar experiences and preoccupations.

Ramírez de Guzmán initiates another implicit but relevant dialogue in “Pintando el invierno.” In a sense, she “converses” with the male poets who used Petrarchan imagery to realize the theme of *carpe diem*. By beginning her poem where these types of poems end, Ramírez de Guzmán subtly twists and questions that tradition. She mocks and excludes traditional Petrarchan imagery and also nullifies the sexually-charged objectification of women in one fell swoop. Ramírez de Guzmán does this by inverting the model, which touches on beauty and change to underline processes but in more realistic and positive terms and without relying on corporeal disintegration. Traditionally, the poetic voice uses winter imagery (old age and death) as a warning and consequence of not exploiting one’s springtime (youth). These poems, consisting of a fragmented female body and corresponding nature elements, typically begin on a positive note and end on a negative one, which allows the poet to objectify and, more importantly, persuade unsettled women to “seize the day”. The male poetic voice at once seduces and immobilizes. Ramírez de Guzmán’s poem, however, reinscribes this male initiative. Like her male counterparts,

she also describes the coming of winter and all of its entailing negative connotations: ("las iras del diciembre" [2]; "desnudas las hojas tienen" [6], "su miedo helados confiesan" [21], "muertas las flores" [23]). But instead of ending her poem on a familiar, ominous note, with the coming of winter coinciding with the metaphorical demise of the female, Ramírez de Guzmán emphasizes winter as cyclical, regenerating, and thus part of a perpetual process rather than a final product: "Treguas les propone el marzo, / y abril socorros le ofrece / con ejércitos de rosas / y escuadrones de mosquetes" (25-28).¹⁹ Ramírez de Guzmán replaces the disjointed, female body and its poetic implications with a non-threatening personification of the seasons to emphasize becoming, renewal, and openness. This inversion the poet realizes relates directly to Bakhtin's ideas on grotesque transformations, which relate to those centrifugal forces mentioned previously and ultimately tie into dialogism. This poem invalidates and debases the *carpe diem* trope and Petrarchan style, both of which functioned to ultimately control women. Gwyn Fox has noted that female poets "...show their capacity to write in this masculine manner, while subverting and ridiculing its pretensions" (19). This poem fulfills several objectives at once: it both complies with and breaks away from literary tradition; and it participates in an implicit dialogue with a wide spectrum of readers, who may gain insight from Ramírez de Guzmán's reinterpretation.

In a similar vein, Maria de Zayas's "XVI Romance" reflects a comparable anti-Petrarchan spirit. The poetic voice converses with a man, Jacinto, who apparently and unjustly continues to profess his love for two different women. The woman to whom the poetic voice belongs is one of these women; the other, named Celia, figures as the poetic voice's rival. Zayas creates a tension-filled scene through the anaphoric "si," which sets up a hypothesis that does not reach resolution until the poem's last stanza. This technique affords the poetic voice authority while it simultaneously allows for a complete development and critique of Jacinto's behavior, underlined here by his emotional and physical double-crossing. This idea is evinced in the last verses of the poem: "¿para qué...engañaste mi inocencia?" (25-28). The poetic voice expresses sadness ("mi eternal pena" [26]) and disillusion ("con falso y fingido amor" [27]) upon realizing that she

has fallen victim to Jacinto's dishonest persuasions, which points at a learning experience (the hard way) and indirectly aligns itself with the tone of Zayas's prologue of her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*. In this way, the poem becomes a way for the poetic voice to bring to light and share with her readers, not to mention Celia and Jacinto, that cathartic moment of disenchantment. By using Petrarchan imagery to disable rather than enable the male agenda, Zayas manages to fully appropriate the images she creates for her own female agenda.

The poem abounds with standard Petrarchan imagery: Celia's eyes, from Jacinto's perspective, are solar beams; her teeth shimmer like pearls; her golden locks are coveted Arabian strands of silk; her hands are the color of snow. Like Ramírez de Guzmán's poem, Zayas works within this tradition of fragmentation, which inevitably recalls standard Petrarchan objectification. At the same time, however, she exploits the same tradition by using it to exalt the condemnation of male hypocrisy rather than physical beauty. As a result the Petrarchan language she uses becomes a (clever) means to a (personal) end. But more importantly Zayas demonstrates how such imagery has the potential to backfire and be used to incriminate rhetorical schemers like Jacinto. In the end, both Zayas's and Ramírez de Guzmán's poems demonstrate that "by calling into question the covert universality of texts, women readers reveal the relativity of the male perspective on literature and set it in dialogue with the female" (Halasek 69).

Doña Leonor de la Cueva y Silva's poetry is thematically similar, in dialogic terms, to that of her female contemporaries. Her motivation for writing "En desagravio de las damas" grows out of an obligation to a group of women who purportedly turn to the poet in order to defend their reputations ("contra un romance insolente / de quien están agraviadas" [3-4]), which demonstrates Olivares's observation that the referenced poem "ha precipitado una reacción social" (52). This petition attests to the possibility of female-dominated literary circles, or, at least circles in which certain discourses touched on women's issues. In addition, it upholds Carol Gilligan's belief that "the female comes to know herself as she is known through her relationships with others" (12). De la Cueva y Silva functions as the envoy of the disconcerted group in question in order to give a voice to an undetermined number of women who otherwise might not be able to represent themselves.²⁰

De la Cueva y Silva's words reflect a sense of sisterhood whereby women work collectively to bring to light a public issue. In this case, the matter involves a man's bias for a particular woman (Anarda), who, as Olivares has pointed out, is most likely not from Medina (52). Her status as an advantaged outsider threatens the other women's immediate sense of self within their community.²¹

The poem reads as would an essay, with an introduction (the reasons behind the poem's composition), thesis (Anarda is not an angel/angelic), body (where she gives examples of other equally or more angelic women in an attempt to invalidate Anarda's purported superiority), and conclusion (which now renders don Vallejo, the other poet in question who gives preference to the undeserving Anarda, a liar). The dialogic quality of her verses is unequivocal and includes De la Cueva y Silva, Don Vallejo, the undervalued *damas*, and Anarda. This dynamism illustrates Bakhtin's ideas on stratification, which he associates with language permeation and saturation: "Concrete socio-ideological language consciousness, as it becomes creative—that is, as it becomes active in literature—discovers itself already surrounded by heteroglossia..." (295). In responding to Vallejo's *romance*, de la Cueva y Silva hints that his poem has unjustly depicted Anarda as an unparalleled object of perfection based solely on his partiality toward her: "Quien mira sólo a su gusto /...por sólo la que le agrada" (11, 14); "dice don Vallejo... / que es sola el ángel Anarda" (5-6).²² In order to strike a balance between all of the women in question, particularly those Vallejo has scorned, de la Cueva y Silva names several beautiful, local women—Antandra, Elvira and Julia Amarilis—and employs praiseworthy metaphors to describe them, concluding that "todas me recen guirnalda" (29).²³ This poem fulfills a double function in that it corrects an injustice that both de la Cueva y Silva and the other women found offensive, and it advocates for objectivity by turning an alleged, written truth into a weaker, unsubstantiated opinion.

Although Anarda becomes the target of De la Cueva y Silva's vituperation by the poem's end when the latter calls the former a "courtesan," a biting remark that adds insult to injury by assaulting Anarda's character as well as Don Vallejo's poor judgment,²⁴ De la Cueva y Silva manages to squelch the uproar Vallejo's *romance* initially instigated. She must chide Anarda, who, despite her position as a

woman, does not figure as a local community member; if order is to be restored, Anarda needs to remain marginalized despite the common gender denominator. As a result, Anarda unfortunately falls victim to Don Vallejo's *faux pas* and the *medinesas* wrath because her behavior, which involves vying for a man's attention, is reprehensible and destabilizing from the other women's perspective. Even though the *medinesas* are essentially culpable of the same petty, jealousy-driven crime (using their physical appearance to entice a man), the support they offer each other and the dialogue they set in motion in the name of public justice are what stand out. In an avenging and counteracting move, De la Cueva y Silva shows her desire to maintain the *damas's* integrity and root out partiality in order to insure the welfare of the majority. She advocates for parity among them, a move that opposes male initiative to create debilitating hierarchies based on personal preference for the exoticized Other. De la Cueva y Silva thus teaches Anarda, Don Vallejo, and women in general that poetry can also be used to create meaningful and influential dialogues in the name of solidarity and equality.

These types of interlocutory poems allow us to see women as striving, active participants in pregnant social dialogues, whereby "the history of women's experiences and women's voices about those experiences leads to the development of alternative ways of knowing and seeing" (Jones 125). The lives fashioned and lessons offered by these seventeenth-century women poets now afford us a new viewpoint from which to bear witness to their impact on the world. This could be why Zabaleta's essay endeavors to impose order, via the male voice, upon what he sees as disorder, represented by the female voice. As a result, his *Error VIII's* acerbic message which aims to obliterate wayward women (poets) becomes nothing more than a scare tactic and ultimately, an expression of his own fear of the "feminine." While Hershberg deems Zabaleta's essay "patentemente didáctico" (viii), its violent tone and non-negotiable message stand in great contrast to women's tendency toward conciliatory dialogue. Bakhtin's centrifugal (female) forces can now better be contrasted with centripetal (male) ones, which, instead of initiating dynamic, dialogic exchanges, prefer to "esteem product, lecture, autonomy, reason and order" (Halasek 71). These centripetal forces, which are intrinsically monologic,

dominate and are reflected in Zabaleta's derisive comments, such as: "Lisonja en labios de mujer hace más daño que lisonja" (43); "...la mujer que es poeta jamás hace nada, porque deja de hacer lo que tiene obligación" (44) and "Habla más de lo que había de hablar, y con mas defectos y superfluidades" (44). Given that the voice, according to Kristin Linklater, is an inherently erotic organ (24), its stimulation reaffirms the interconnections between speaking, pleasure, and conduct. For this reason, a woman who speaks was, by default, considered more prone to lascivious or, at the least, inappropriate behavior, as Wiesner points out: "a 'loose' tongue implied other sorts of loose behavior, and a woman who wanted her thoughts known by others was suspected of wanting to make her body available as well" (189). Nonetheless, the relationship between a loquacious woman and her lack of virtue prove to be, as Howard Bloch asserts, "a staple of anti-feminist prejudice" (15), which, he concludes, is motivated by the desire to silence women (17).

Zabaleta's most sardonic comment summarizes his opinion of women poets and reinforces Linklater's provocative voice/body duality:

Yo apostaré que una mujer destas, las sábanas que rompe de noche buscando, a vuelcos, los conceptos, no las remienda de día por escribir los conceptos que buscó entre las sábanas y leerse los a sus conocidos. También apostaré que, si estando escribiendo ve que se le cae un hijo en la lumbre, por no levantar la pluma del papel, le socorre tarde o no le socorre. ¡Fuego de Dios en ella! (43)²⁵

Zabaleta's culminating hyperbolic conjecture exemplifies his belief that a woman writer must be prone to immorality. His erroneous corollary, however, is fear-driven and better understood in the context of Linklater, who concludes that the sensual nature of the voice defines who we are and what we can be: "The *vox eroticus* is the instrument that guides us to the larger Self that lurks inside us, yearning to break free from the shackles of conformity, correctness and the judgment of an imagined hostile world" (27). Because this description also aligns with woman throughout history, women's voices now resound louder than ever.

The female poets included in this essay clearly demonstrate that women were, in fact, speaking volumes. Even though women may

not have partaken equally in formal educational advances (Wiesner 171) they were progressively informing themselves, albeit informally, as well as those around them through their verses, even at the most fundamental levels. While undoubtedly, as Vollendorf has argued, “[t]he women who gained an education outside convent walls did so in spite of the mandate to provide women with only enough education to make them good wives—certainly not good scholars, activists, or writers” (“Lives” 169-70), these dialogic poems reveal how women managed to make strides toward self-realization, compromise, and (the dissemination of) knowledge or information, despite a society whose objective was to discourage such progress. This impression corresponds to Amy Katz Kaminsky’s regard for Spanish women of the time period, who she claims by no means remained silent (5), as well as Austern’s estimation that “[c]ontrary to influential male conduct writers who would confine her to the home and keep her from many worthwhile pursuits, her accomplishments went well beyond the personal exercise of needle, distaff, and spindle. She did not always maintain the silence and invisibility prescribed for her” (15).

As a result Zabaleta’s final inquiry, “¿Cómo ha de andar casa donde, en lugar de agujas, hay plumas y en lugar de almohadillas, cartapacios?” (43) in a twenty-first century context says more about male anxiety in relation to emerging, authoritative female voices than it does female prerogative. These seventeenth-century female-authored poems thus hint at why the plume in the hands of a woman was, in fact, a formidable weapon: “If we are searching for a model that moves away from defining authority exclusively as a form of problem solving and toward a metaphor that emphasizes that authority is a contextual, relational process of communication and connection, then it may be that examining “female” experience will provide us with such an alternative” (Jones 125). Returning to Miller’s term alluded to in the title of this article, it becomes clear that when considering early modern women writers’ arachnologies, “it is particularly important to take note of what might be termed the ‘difference within’ their texts, when gender distinctions among putative readers or listeners are brought to the fore” (146). This idea of difference allows us to come full circle with Halasek, whose ideas on reading and writing as a woman ultimately make the monologic dialogic (73).

From a Bakhtinian perspective, then, women's dialogic poetry demonstrates how authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters encourage heteroglossia: each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (*Dialogic* 263). Bakhtin's theories now afford new ways of reading and interpreting writing that place women's voices previously at the periphery toward the center of communication both inside and outside the text.²⁶ But more importantly, from a feminist vantage point, these poems show how women writers might have dealt with educational limitations and opportunistically created dialogic networks that scholars are only beginning to discover. Certain poems with informal, didactic undertones, in light of the networks women created, maintained, and promoted can now influence the way we construct the canon as well as learn from women's cultural production throughout Spain's early modern period.

NOTES

¹The image of the web calls to mind Naomi Miller's term "arachnology," which she defines as "the critical practice of reading women's texts to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity" ("Changing" 144). The epigraph is from *La esclava de su amante*, 128. Zayas, who "proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (Gilbert and Gubar 49) here speaks to the art of writing verses as a woman.

²Vollendorf has noted that "[i]nterpretations of women as home-bound bystanders on the sidelines of change and upheaval have been replaced by nuanced studies about women's participation in the economic, political, and cultural landscapes." ("Lives" 82) The act of writing now assumes new dimensions: "Historical relativism has invited us to consider the interactivity of literary and nonliterary texts and the social and political contexts of literary production" (Woods 325).

³Michael Holquist views any utterance as an act of co-authorship (13).

⁴Vollendorf urges scholars to broaden their definition of education in order to fully understand women's educational history (xiii).

⁵Adrienne L. Martin, referring to the poet Catalina Ramírez de Guzmán, observes that "nos transmite el mundo cotidiano del que se nutrieron ella y otros poetas" (251). The verb "nourish" has a compelling implication: "[t]he benefits women derived from the companionship and support of other women cannot be underestimated" (Fox 141).

⁶Kay Halasek points out that "Bakhtin does not consider gender in his discussion of linguistic stratification" (64). In her accommodating article that attempts to find overlap between Bakhtinian thought and feminism, she succeeds in celebrating Bakhtin without compromising a feminist viewpoint: "In the end, I am...not so concerned with Bakhtin's omitting the feminist force in his work. We, you and I, add that. It need not be present, for feminist voices will enter the dialogue, despite (or perhaps because) of this absence" (73).

⁷Holquist claims that Bakhtin privileges the notion of dialogue, or *novelness*, which is not necessarily limited to the novel itself (72). He also mentions that "in concrete examples of poetic works it is possible to find features fundamental to prose" (n. 287). Bakhtin himself asserts, referring to the limitations of poetry, "[t]his does not mean, of course, that heteroglossia or even a foreign language is completely shut out of a poetic work" (286). Bakhtin identifies satiric and comedic genres as highly heteroglot (286-7).

⁸This idea recalls Judith Fetterly's notion of the "resisting reader."

⁹Jones explains how to read women's writings in a different authorial light: "If we are searching for a model that moves away from defining authority

exclusively as a form of problem solving and toward a metaphor that emphasizes that authority as a contextual, relational process of communication and connection, then it may be that examining "female" experience will provide us with such an alternative" (125).

¹⁰Holquist speaks to the inherent pedagogical quality of all literature: "Literary texts are tools; they serve as a prosthesis of the mind. As such, they have a tutoring capacity that materially effects change by getting from one stage to another. The tutoring is not intentionally directed in any trivial sense toward specific goals, beyond that of teaching the world's difference and diversity" (83).

¹¹Fray Luis de León wrote a century earlier that since, in his estimation, women were not particularly wise, "el mayor consejo que le podemos dar a las tales es rogarles que callen" (108).

¹²Although Zabaleta's "misogyny" is questioned or relativized by some critics, who prefer to see his writings in a more satiric light, it is impossible to overlook the fact that during the time period, it was not uncommon for female-authored texts to receive profanation from their male counterparts (Miller, "Icons" 146).

¹³In his estimation, a woman who educated herself to become a writer could not simultaneously be a good mother and wife, which were considered the ultimate "duties" of any God-fearing woman. During a time where the Church was at once powerful yet vulnerable, the representatives of Christian tradition became more and more vigilant and critical of women who dared step outside their ascribed gender roles.

¹⁴Bakhtin's notion of socio-ideological languages (272), which he describes as "languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth" (272), offers interesting possibilities for women's studies.

¹⁵Olivares has noted that "la imagen de la mujer como espejo de su esposo es común en los tratados didácticos y escritos morales sobre la conducta femenina escrita por hombres" ("Tras el espejo" 3). Ann Rosalind Jones explains the ways in which women poets fragment that metaphorical mirror and how recent "feminist archeology" (2) has unearthed new findings that question "the logics of power" (4).

¹⁶While the authors write within a racial context, the term is both useful for and applicable to gender studies. The adjectives they use recall Bloch in that expressing hatred toward women can have physical repercussions.

¹⁷Vollendorf comments that "[e]l análisis del yo y de una forma de expresión exclusivamente femenina encapsula la búsqueda de la autenticidad femenina en la poesía de mujeres poetas" ("Comunidades" 230-31).

¹⁸See Olivares's comment on the "*manceba esquivada* and *escarmentada*" ("Towards" 29).

¹⁹Olivares reads the poem as a metaphorical battleground for masculine and feminine elements ("Tras el espejo" 94-95).

²⁰See Olivares's Introduction (48) for the possible reasons surrounding such a petition.

²¹Olivares refers to this as "the collective female enmity against another woman" ("Towards" 34-35).

²²I have been unable to identify the author of the referred poem (Don Vallejo) to whom De la Cueva y Silva responds.

²³The verse has been corrected in *Tras el espejo la musa escribe: lírica femenina de los Siglos de Oro*. 2^a edición revisada. Madrid: Akal/Siglo Veintiuno, 2011.

²⁴See Olivares's note regarding the connotations of the word "*cortesana*" ("Tras el espejo" 143).

²⁵This quote recalls Dana Crowley Jack's notion of the "Over-Eye," a third-person, interior voice that women assume when trying to reconcile their feelings (of depression) and moral

obligation. She describes this Eye as surveillant, vigilant, and patriarchal (94). Although the voice in this case is external (that of Zabaleta), it performs a similar role to that of the internal Over-Eye, which "persistently pronounces harsh judgment on most aspects of a woman's authentic strivings, including her wish to express herself freely..." (94).

²⁶Bakhtin celebrates his view of language: "What we have in mind here is not an abstract linguistic minimum of a common language, in the sense of a system of elementary forms (linguistic symbols) guaranteeing a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication. We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (271).

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