

**Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Seventeenth-Century New Spain and Finding a Room of One's Own**

Deborah Weagel

*University of New Mexico*

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**Deborah Weagel,**

**"Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Seventeenth-Century New Spain and Finding a Room of One's Own"**

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**Abstract:** In her paper, "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Seventeenth-Century New Spain and Finding a Room of One's Own," Deborah Weagel examines the life of the seventeenth-century nun and compares her life with the ideals Virginia Woolf portrays in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf asserts that in order for a woman to develop innate gifts, she needs a certain degree of financial freedom and private space in which to create. The concept of having one's own room, or space, that can be segregated from the activities of home and public life can be considered both literally and metaphorically. Sor Juana, who lived in the latter half of the seventeenth century in New Spain, struggled to find space in which to work and create. She contended throughout her life with a dominant patriarchal culture which was strongly evidenced in domestic life, politics, and religion. She also lived during the Spanish Inquisition, which severely punished dissenters and aggressors against the Catholic Church. Despite these difficult obstacles, however, Sor Juana was successful in finding space to write, create, compose, and obtain knowledge. Part of the genius of Sor Juana is found not only in the concrete product of her extraordinary talents, but also in her ability to find a room of her own, both literally and metaphorically, in which to develop her gifts. The actual physical space in which she worked, the discursive space in which she expressed herself, and the psychological space in which she explored various states of consciousness are explored.

**Deborah WEAGEL**

### **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Seventeenth-Century New Spain and Finding a Room of One's Own**

In this paper I examine the life of the seventeenth-century nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (see, e.g., Villar <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sorjuana>>), and contrast her life with the ideals Virginia Woolf portrays in *A Room of One's Own*. Sor Juana, who lived in the latter half of the seventeenth century in New Spain, struggled to find space in which to work and create. She contended throughout her life with a dominant patriarchal culture which was strongly evidenced in domestic life, politics, and religion. She also lived during the Spanish Inquisition, which punished dissenters and aggressors against the Catholic Church severely. Despite these difficult obstacles, however, Sor Juana was successful in finding space to write, create, compose, and obtain knowledge. I claim that part of the genius of Sor Juana is found not only in the concrete product of her extraordinary talents, but also in her ability to find a room of her own, both literally and metaphorically, in which to develop her gifts. I explore in particular the actual physical space in which she worked, the discursive space in which she expressed herself, and the psychological space in which she explored various states of consciousness.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). She asserts that in order for a woman to develop innate gifts, she needs a certain degree of financial freedom and private space in which to create. The concept of having one's own room, or space, that can be segregated from the activities of home and public life can be considered both literally and metaphorically. How does a creative, intelligent, and gifted woman find a room of her own both physically and mentally? How does she attain a position in which she can have the necessary solitude and space to transform the meanderings of her mind and heart into structured and concrete expression? Although Woolf was an author, her words are not limited to writers. They can be applied to any type of academic, artistic, musical, and/or creative output. Furthermore, they can be useful in analyzing not only the lives of her contemporaries, but women in the past and future; not just women in England, but women all over the globe. Sor Juana, for example, lived in a patriarchal society in which women did not share equal status with men. The domination of men in seventeenth-century New Spain is evidenced, in part, through the physical spaces established during that time period. In her book, *Gendered Spaces*, Daphne Spain writes: "Spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power" (15). She explains that by "controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced" (15-16). She says, "Thus, spatial boundaries contribute to the unequal status of women. For women to become more knowledgeable, they must also change places" (16). During her life, Sor Juana experienced spatial segregation that had the potential of limiting her access to knowledge. Therefore, to more adequately satisfy her desire for knowledge and greater understanding, she found it necessary to make a number of intentional changes in the spaces in which she functioned. For example, Sor Juana exhibited signs of intellectual ability at an early age. In *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (*The Poet's Answer to the Most Illustrious Sor Filotea de la Cruz*), Sor Juana tells of following her sister to school when she was a young child. The school mistress allowed her to continue to attend school, and she learned to read very quickly (*The Answer/La Respuesta* 48-49). The precocious young child changed space on her own accord from the domestic world in which she was most strongly influenced by her mother, to an academic institution in which she received formal training in reading. She chose to leave an atmosphere of cooking and cleaning to immerse herself in an environment in which she could develop her mind.

Another significant physical space that Sor Juana discovered as a young girl was the library of her grandfather, who was, likely, a knowledgeable man (Kirk 20). Sor Juana had initially wanted to make a more radical change of space and pleaded with her mother to send her to the university in Mexico City. However, her mother refused to support this move, and in response Sor Juana wrote:

"Yo despiqué el deseo en leer muchos libros varios que tenía mi abuelo, sin que bastasen castigos ni reprensiones a estorbarlo" (*The Answer/La Respuesta* 48) ("I quenched my desire by reading a great variety of books that belonged to my grandfather, and neither punishments nor scoldings could prevent me") (*The Answer/La Respuesta* 51). Thus Sor Juana found a new space, a masculine space, in the library of her grandfather. Spain writes: "Masculine spaces ... contain socially valued knowledge of theology, law, and medicine, while feminine spaces (such as the home) contain devalued knowledge of child care, cooking, and cleaning" (10-11). Sor Juana, by nature, gravitated to a man's library which enabled her to continue learning and to gratify, to some extent, her craving for knowledge. Eventually, Sor Juana entered a new space when she was introduced to the viceregal court in Mexico City. As a teenager "her cleverness, intelligence, and beauty made her an instant sensation" (Stavans xxvii). The vicereine, Doña Leonor Carreto, Marquesa de Mancera, was impressed with young Sor Juana and made her a lady in waiting. In *La Ciudad de los Palacios*, Alfonso Vásquez Mellado writes that in 1667 the Marqués de Mancera attended a ceremony to dedicate a cathedral in Mexico City area. He was assisted by his wife who was accompanied by "una encantadora criolla de inmensos ojos y facciones delicadas" (92) ("a charming creole woman with huge eyes and delicate features"; all translations are mine unless indicated otherwise). The "bella jovencita" (92) ("pretty teenager") was named Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez, who composed "hermosas poesías" (92) ("beautiful poems"). She was much appreciated in society for "sus cualidades físicas como intelectuales y morales" (92) ("her physical as well as intellectual and moral qualities").

Although life at court represented a huge leap for Sor Juana in terms of changing space, she still existed in a patriarchal society that created certain barriers to distinguish men's space from women's space. According to Antonio Rubial García, at the colonial palace the lower area was used as a service space where one could find the "cochera, caballeriza, corral, despensas y habitación de la servidumbre masculina" (79) ("coach house, stable, corral, pantries, and living quarters for the male servants") while the upper area contained rooms for the family and the female servants. Boys and girls occupied separate quarters and each married couple had its own room. Bathtubs and latrines were "comunes para todos los miembros de la familia" (79) ("common for all the members of the family"). The area for the mother was a place of child birth and lactation, where she was assisted by midwives and wet nurses. It was also a space for participation in ancestral practices where stories were told and shared. Then, ultimately, it was a room of death, where the woman departed from this life amidst religious rituals and tears. The kitchen was an area where food was prepared and consumed and where the rumors and news of the streets were shared. One salon provided space for the family and servants to congregate and to pray, and for the women to embroider while someone read a "libro piadoso" (81) ("pious book") or played an instrument. Another salon was a place of evening gatherings and social gatherings. It was where women gossiped and spoke of love affairs while men expressed opinions and spoke of current events and happenings. Spain explains that "'spatial institutions' form barriers to women's acquisition of knowledge by assigning women and men to different gendered spaces" (10). Women were segregated in certain rooms for lactation, child birth, story telling, and death. Even when men and women gathered together in a social setting, there tended to be a separation of women who gossiped and men who discussed current news. The palace of the viceroy, "commonly ... some great nobleman of Spain, whose power [was] to make laws and ordinances, to give directions, and determine controversies" (Gage 77), exemplified a model of luxury in New Spain that was comparable to some of the courts in Europe. The edifice was a firm structure with three patios; some areas and rooms were designated for government where there was a court of justice, an armory, and a jail. In the part of the palace reserved for the family, one found various dormitories, a domestic chapel, a room for comedies, and a salon for receptions. The decor included many "colgaduras, alfombras, lienzos, relojes y pinturas" (García 86) ("tapestries, carpets, linens, clocks, and pictures"). Receptions and parties were held at the palace, where musicians, dancers, and actors performed. Furthermore, the palace was a showcase for the European styles in dress, hairdos, and jewelry. Spain had started to imitate some of the styles of the French court of Louis XIV, with its wigs, long military coats, and

dresses with low necks. These fashions also influenced New Spain in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

During the period of time that Sor Juana was associated with the viceregal court, some of the rooms and spaces mentioned above would have become very familiar to her. Often when the viceroy was occupied with his various responsibilities, the vicereine participated in numerous social activities in the city. As she visited convents, accepted invitations to visit neighbors, and attended religious and public ceremonies, she was accompanied by a small retinue of young women. Sor Juana accompanied her during some of these engagements and would have become acquainted with other spaces and places as well. Although she would have been relegated to the traditional spaces accessible to women, Sor Juana was certainly able to segregate herself enough physically and/or mentally to pursue her intellectual and creative interests. Furthermore, court life, in some ways, stimulated her development. García writes: "Seguramente fueron las virreinas quienes introdujeron el gusto por la poesía lírica y por los valores del amor cortés, expresiones de una concepción de la nobleza que tenía mucho de medieval. Fue en la corte virreinal donde sor Juana vivió los años de su adolescencia protegida por la marquesa de Mancera; y fue de hecho esa misma corte la que le brindó, a través de sus virreinas, protección, trabajo e inspiración durante su vida conventual" (86) ("Certainly it was the vicereines who introduced the love for lyric poetry and the values of courtly love, which were expressions of a conception of nobility influenced by the medieval world. It was in the vicereinal court that Sor Juana lived her adolescent years protected by the Marquesa de Mancera. It was the same court which, through her vicereines, offered her protection, work, and inspiration during her life at the convent"). However, Sor Juana eventually chose to abandon courtly life to become a nun, at which time she became Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and was nicknamed "the Tenth Muse" and "the Mexican Phoenix" (Stavans xxxv) in response to her many talents and abilities.

The move from the court to the convent was another major and intentional change of space for Sor Juana. The question of why she chose to enter the convent has been posed, and there have been various responses. In her article, "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz," Dorothy Schons addresses this question. In response to some that say it was in reaction to a young man in her life, Schons states: "That she sought refuge in her books because of a broken heart is impossible" (39). In her own writing Sor Juana explains: "Entréme religiosa, porque aunque conocía que tenía el estado cosas ... muchas repugnantes a mi genio, con todo, para la total 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" (*The Answer/La Respuesta* 50) ("I took the veil because, although I knew I would find in religious life many things that would be quite opposed to my character ... it would, given my absolute unwillingness to enter into marriage, be the least unfitting and the most decent state I could choose, with regard to the assurance I desired of my salvation" (51). It would seem that out of the options available to women at that time, life as a nun offered a certain privacy and solitude not as readily available in domestic or courtly realms. Sor Juana was overtly opposed to marriage, and as Schons points out, "she was a *criolla* ... living at a Spanish court. She was therefore at its mercy ... her position was not safe" (45). There were those who would be attracted to her beauty and intelligence, and attempt to take advantage of her lower rank. Schons cites Father Calleja who wrote: "the good face of a poor woman is a white wall on which every fool will want to leave his mark" (45). So in choosing to become a nun, Sor Juana was not unaware that the decision would also "insure" her "salvation."

In the late seventeenth century in the strongly patriarchal environment in which Sor Juana lived, women usually had three options regarding the direction they would take in their lives: "the domestic, the courtly, and the monastic" (Stavans xxv). In a sense, Sor Juana was involved in all three. As a child, she experienced the domestic setting established by her mother, which she chose to avoid as a young woman. She also participated in an affluent and courtly world, in which she was well received, but which she ultimately rejected. Then she entered the Reformed Carmelite convent of San José in 1667, where she stayed for only three months. Finally, she became part of the Convent of Santa Paula of the Order of San Jerónimo, where she remained for the rest of her life. At the Convent of Santa Paula, Sor Juana had both a room of her own and money to live

in relatively sophisticated surroundings. Kirk writes that this change from the court to the convent enabled Sor Juana "to continue to study" and "to accept commissions to write because they enhanced the reputation of her convent" (23). The convent represented a distinct woman's domain and Nancy Cushing-Daniels explains: "In Spain and other parts of the Hispanic world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the convent encompassed all of these characteristics: an affinity group or woman's space, the sponsorship of powerful women who supported literary endeavors, and a group of women readers" (13). She states further: "Although women's religious communities were under the control of the greater Church hierarchy, they did provide a space for women free from the family definitions of wife and mother, even though symbolically the women who entered them became wives of Jesus and both sisters and mothers to the other nuns" (109). It was in the convent that Sor Juana found a variety of rooms and spaces in which to work. She lived, for example, in a private apartment with a sitting area and kitchen. There was ample "space for books, musical instruments, maps and other research material" and "she frequently found herself surrounded by silence and tranquility conducive to writing at her leisure" (Stavans xxxvi). She enjoyed the services of a part-time servant who assisted her in a variety of ways, including washing and cooking. Furthermore, a benefactor provided her with means to live quite comfortably and to acquire an impressive collection of folk art, musical instruments, books, scientific instruments, and other items.

Although she had help, it is apparent that Sor Juana did some cooking herself, and thus the kitchen was another important room in her life. María Stoopen writes that in the Convent of San Jerónimo each cell included a kitchen with a "brasero de barro, algunas estaban recubiertas de azulejos de talavera, con una oquedad para guardar el carbón y la leña, una pila o depósito de agua y otro donde lavar los trastos" (qtd. in Lavín 14) ("a clay hearth, some which were covered with glazed talavera tiles, with a space to keep the coal and firewood, one basin or reservoir of water and another to wash the cookware"). A manuscript of thirty-six recipes from the cloister of San Jerónimo was published for the first time in 1979, under the title of *Libro de cocina*. Sor Juana is accredited for the selection and transcription of the recipes. According to Lavín, "Este libro de cocina no sólo refleja la gastronomía barroca del siglo XVII sino la elección de la poeta y se añade a la enigmática figura de la 'Décima musa'" (7) ("This cookbook does not just reflect baroque gastronomy of the 17th century, but also the selections of the poetess, and enhances the enigmatic figure of the 'Tenth Muse'"). And in *The Answer/La Respuesta*, Sor Juana discusses cooking and associates it with philosophy. Her time spent in the kitchen is not solely for the purpose of creating cuisine that will sustain and nurture her body. The kitchen becomes a laboratory overseen by a woman with a probing and inquisitive mind, and in the process of cooking her intellect is nourished and stimulated. Sor Juana writes of the "secretos naturales" (74) ("secrets of nature") (75) she has discovered while in the kitchen: "Veo que un huevo se une y fríe en la manteca o aceite y, por contrario, se despedaza en el almíbar; ver que para que el azúcar se conserve fluida basta echarle una muy mínima parte de agua en que haya estado membrillo u otra fruta agria; ver que la yema y clara de un mismo huevo son tan contrarias, que en los unos, que sirven para el azúcar, sirve cada una de por sí y juntos no" (74) ("I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup. Or again, to ensure that sugar flow freely one need only add the slightest bit of water that has held quince or some other sour fruit. The yolk and white of the very same egg are of such a contrary nature that when eggs are used with sugar, each part separately may be used perfectly well, yet they cannot be mixed together" (75). She asks, "Pero, señora, ¿qué podemos saber las mujeres sino filosofías de cocina?" (74) ("But in truth, my Lady, what can we women know, save philosophies of the kitchen?") (75). She says that if Aristotle had prepared meals, "mucho más hubiera escrito" (74) ("he would have written a great deal more") (75). It is not certain whether she cooked out of necessity or just for pleasure, but it can be seen that the kitchen was an important space for Sor Juana. Thus the kitchen represents a physical, literal room for creation, and the workings and analyses of the nun's mind depict more of a metaphorical space.

Music was a significant part of Sor Juana's world, and in her private apartment she was able to play instruments, compose, and write about music theory. Furthermore, much of her poetry, such

as the villancicos and loas, were intended to be set to music. Pamela H. Long explains in her book on Sor Juana and music that San Jerónimo was "a center of musical performance and pedagogy" (17). Musical fiestas were held at the convent and Sor Juana had the opportunity to take part in them. Long writes that Sor Juana "probably played several instruments, since this was a typical pastime for a lady of her social standing during the seventeenth century" (21). Although there is no concrete evidence that Sor Juana composed, Long says that there is "plenty of rumor, conjecture and supposition, some of which is valid, and the case seems probable" (19). Furthermore, she wrote a treatise on music called, *El caracol*, which is now lost. Long suggests that the title of the musical treatise, *El caracol*, may have been inspired by a winding staircase, a "caracol," that was used to go from the Coro Bajo to the Coro Alto in the Templo de San Jerónimo. Sor Juana would have been in this parish church on a daily basis to hear mass and to sing the Divine Office in the Coro de Monjas. Long says of Sor Juana: "it may have occurred to her that she was climbing upwards in a spiral toward her harmonic duties, in the same way that notes on a musical scale wind upwards in their acoustic ascent" (1). In this treatise, Long writes that Sor Juana may have made an association with the physical ascent to a celestial atmosphere, where she and other nuns imitated the music of "heavenly choirs" (2), to some of her ideas regarding music theory. In one of her poems, Sor Juana writes of "la Armonía" ("harmony") as a "línea espiral no un círculo" (1) ("spiral line, not a circle"), and mentions a work entitled, *Caracol*. Sor Juana likely drew upon and was inspired by the tangible space that she encountered on a daily basis. Although the spiral staircase at the church was not a private room of her own, it was a familiar space that facilitated her ascent to musical and spiritual duties. Even though she may have been in a group when she used the staircase, her mind was free to analyze and think about parallels between the physical structure and music theory. So during her daily activities when Sor Juana could take advantage of silence and meditation, she enjoyed a type of metaphorical space of her own in which her mind could fervently work through ideas, problems, and theories. She seemed particularly gifted at making associations between the objects of her physical, daily life and her mental, more abstract and intangible thoughts.

In *The Answer/La Respuesta*, Sor Juana writes of the both the practical and theoretical aspect of mastering some subjects, including music. She says that it is difficult to obtain perfection in performance if one's time is too divided, and states that "mientras se toca el arpa sosiega el órgano" (56) ("while the harp is playing the organ is still") (57). She explains that "porque como es menester mucho uso corporal para adquirir hábito, nunca le puede tener perfecto quien se reparte en varios ejercicios" (56) ("Much bodily repetition is needed to form a habit, and therefore a person whose time is divided among several exercises will never develop one perfectly") (57). However, she believes the opposite is the case with formal or theoretical arts, and that dividing one's attention to a variety of fields can, in fact, enhance one's understanding of them. She writes: "pero se ayudan dando luz y abriendo camino las unas para las otras, por variaciones y ocultos engarces -- que para esta cadena universal les puso la sabiduría de su Autor -- de manera que parece se corresponden y están unidas con admirable trabazón y concierto" (56) ("these subjects help one another, shedding light and opening a path from one to the next, by way of divergences and hidden links -- for they were set in place so as to form this universal chain by the wisdom of their great Author. Thus it appears that they correspond each one to another and are united with a wondrous bond and harmonious agreement") (57). Sor Juana delighted in finding interconnections between various subjects, such a cooking and philosophy, and believed that study of the theory of one field aided the understanding of another. Her process of making such associations depicts the room metaphorically set apart in her mind to explore and consider interdisciplinary links.

The theater was also of significance to Sor Juana, who was a playwright. She lived in an era when the theater was important in religious, cultural, and social life in New Spain. Maria Esther Perez explains that the theater underwent great development "desde los comienzos de la conquista como medio de difusión de las ideas religiosas" (54) ("from the beginnings of the conquest as a means of the diffusion of religious ideas"). Once the conquest had been achieved and a viceroy was established, there was a demand for a more secular type of theater. It was through the theater that the viceroy and the court sought solace and entertainment. Some directors of hospi-

tals and orphanages also utilized theater productions to help raise funds for their respective cause. Religious theater was particularly prominent during the festivities celebrating the day of *Corpus Christi*. Perez writes that these celebrations "no eran sólo de carácter eclesiástico, sino también populares" (55) ("were not just of an ecclesiastic character, but were also popular"), in that the church during this epoch was a center of social life. One of Sor Juana's plays, a comedy, "Los empeños de una casa" ("The House of Trials") was performed in 1683 in the home of Don Fernando Deza. It was presented in connection with a festival that honored the viceroy and vicereine, the Count and Countess of Paredes, and the arrival of a new Archbishop, Don Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas. David Pasto writes: "These private performances in the palace or homes of the nobility served to display the wealth and taste of the viceregal court and to flatter the reigning or newly arrived political, social, and religious authorities" (*House of Trials* 10). So although Sor Juana was in the convent, she was still connected to the outside world. During this time her creative space was at the Convent of Santa Paula, but the influence of her work extended well beyond the walls within which she was cloistered. Furthermore, there was a girls' school at the convent "that offered music, dance, and theater classes, in which Sor Juana participated by writing lyrics" (Stavans xxxvi). So she was able to contribute directly to the artistic activities at the convent. In addition, although she followed a religious regimen, it was expected that she would participate in other activities at the convent such as "poetry tournaments, musical concerts, theatrical events, masquerades" (Stavans xxxvi), and so forth. Thus while part of her world included seclusion and privacy where she could work and study alone in her own apartment, there was also shared space in which she interacted with young girls and other adults. In fact, lay visitors were sometimes allowed to come to the convent, and participate in some of the activities. Luis Harss is quoted as saying, "It was an age of great pageantry, given to grand entries through ceremonial arches, majestic Te Deums with ringing church bells, allegorical floats and fireworks, dramatic mystery plays, rousing popular farces" (qtd. in Stavans xxxvi).

Thus, Sor Juana lived quite comfortably and enjoyed a certain degree of freedom. Josefina Muriel writes that "las actividades intelectuales de Sor Juana estaban implícitamente autorizadas por las reglas" (270) ("the intellectual activities of Sor Juana were implicitly authorized by the rules"), and that she could do as she pleased during her free time. Furthermore, nuns during this epoch did not experience simple lives devoid of material luxuries and worldly finery. They wore handsome clothes and jewelry, had slaves and servants, and performed their duties in the comfort of elegant furnishings and decor. Cushing-Daniels writes: "Not only did women religious in many circumstances maintain their friendships with secular women but with men as well. Some of the men who cultivated friendships with nuns were known as *galanes de monjas*" (111). She explains that "they were usually upper class, and often visited the nuns in the convent, both alone and in social gatherings, to improve their image" (111). However, Sor Juana was not completely allowed to do whatever she pleased at all times. For example, she was not permitted to leave the convent and eventually died there. For a woman of her generation, however, she did succeed in obtaining a life style quite conducive to the production of creative work and writing as Virginia Woolf suggests is necessary in *A Room of One's Own*.

In *Sor Juana y su mundo*, some of the economic conditions in New Spain in the late seventeenth century are discussed. This was a time of economic ups and downs due to the irregularity of mining production, various problems with agriculture production, and the expense of Spanish defense in the Caribbean as well as wars in Europe. Yet a wealthy and elite economic class emerged which had ties to the Church and helped fund some of the convents in New Spain. The text states, "Los claustros femeninos dependieron casi exclusivamente de esa filantropía individual o familiar de la élite" (37) ("The feminine cloisters depended almost exclusively on this individual and familial philanthropy of the elite"). Two common ways in which the patrons assisted the church were to help establish convents and to provide an endowment for young people who wanted to enter into religious life. Sor Juana, thanks to the generosity of Pedro Velázquez de la Cadena, was a recipient of such an endowment. The sponsors, in return, received a certain degree of recognition and social status for their philanthropy. This sponsorship enabled Sor Juana some of the leisure she needed to pursue her academic and creative work. Thus she had the money pro-

vided that Virginia Woolf believes a woman needs to engage in intellectual activities. Although she did have some restrictions as a nun, she enjoyed a certain degree of freedom within the structure of this particular convent. However, it is also important to note that there were some major obstacles in the life of Sor Juana, including the hovering cloud of the Spanish Inquisition. An English translation of Paolo Sarpi's *The History of the Inquisition* was published in 1639, and states: "In the yeare 1484, the Catholick King *Ferdinand*, having extinguished the Kingdome of the *Mahometans* in *Grenata*, to purge his, and his Wife *Elizabeths* Kingdomes from the *Moores* and *Iewes* newly converted, erected with the consent of Pope *Sixtus* the Fourth, a Tribunall of the Inquisition in all his Kingdomes of *Spaine*, *Sicily*, and *Sardinia* which were by him possessed, in the forme which it lasteth into this present; by which Tribunall are judged, not onely these which are accused of *Mahometisme*, or *Iudaisme*, but also of Heresie" (12). This marked the beginning of an attempt by the King and Queen of Spain to unify their country and holdings through Catholicism. The Spanish Inquisition resulted in very bloody, violent, and treacherous treatment to those who did not conform to Catholicism. It was established not only in Spain, but in Spanish American colonies as well, and was not abolished until the early nineteenth century.

In his book, *A Short History of the Inquisition*, Alexander G. Cardew describes the use of torture in the colonies: "Torture was used for all kinds of offences, such as heresy, witchcraft, failing to attend divine service, possession of forbidden books or literature, celebration of Mass by those not ordained priests, failure to uncover in the presence of a viceroy or a dignitary of the Church, failure to denounce heretics or sorcerers, living a dissolute life, living among Indians, expressing revolutionary or heretical opinions, etc." (104). Cardew writes the after the Inquisition was abolished, "many secret underground cells and dungeons were found, in some of which were skeletons of long-forgotten prisoners still chained to the walls" (105). Thus, when the Inquisition tightened its grip in New Spain, Sor Juana was not at complete liberty to function as she pleased, and, in fact, could potentially suffer severe consequences if she became too bold in either her behavior or writing. Furthermore, the masculine leadership in the church, to which Sor Juana was subject, created problems for her at times as well. Regardless of any degree of latitude she experienced at the convent, she was still expected to submit to male hierarchy. Spain writes of gender divisions commonly found in religious institutions which perpetuate male dominance, and explains that these institutions "have spatial components as well" (241). She says that throughout the years certain religions have made it a practice to segregate men and women, "and organized religion often reinforces women's lower status" (241). She mentions the practice in Catholicism to provide monasteries for men and convents for women, and discusses how "the Orthodox Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim religions still limit their most prestigious positions (rabbi, priest, and mullah) to men; thus, sacred forms of knowledge are reserved for men" (241). So when Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, Bishop of Puebla (in the guise of Sor Filotea), sent Sor Juana a letter of chastisement, she was expected to heed his advice. Jean Franco in her book *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* writes: "Confessors both encouraged and tightly controlled the writing of nuns, often confiscating and hiding their notes on mystical experience. Nuns were naturally enough influenced by this control and many held writing in suspicion" (28). In his letter, the Bishop suggested that Sor Juana adhere more closely to the structure of the convent and leave the writing of theology to the male clergy. In his foreword to an anthology on Sor Juana, Octavio Paz writes that the Bishop "made no secret of his disagreement. Nor did he stop at expressing his objections to her theology; he also reproved her intellectual and literary inclinations" (vii). Paz explains that Sor Juana's formal response to this letter brought about a certain degree of criticism from other superiors, and was held in contempt by certain individuals in power. Sor Juana, however, continued to write and explore the discursive space in her life. Such space can include her conversations with others, but here I refer most particularly to her written word, of which we have a record. Franco states that in New Spain during this epoch, "the domains of discourse were constituted around the viceregal court and the Church," and that these two areas "were never entirely separate since courtly relations were apt to be transcoded into the religious" (25). She explains that in certain parts of Europe, such as England and France, "new domains of discourse had come into being around the marketplace and the printing shop" (26). Thus elsewhere literature was developing as

an entity separate from the court and Church, while in colonial New Spain it was still strongly connected.

Franco writes that Sor Juana stayed fairly well within the confines of the contemporary discourse of her day, but took "advantage of the moves that were open to her within the patronage of the court and Church" (29). She employed a variety of approaches that were at times overt and in other instances more discreet. One method was to emphasize her feminine perspective openly, as can be found in the following excerpt: "Hombres necios que acusáis / a la mujer sin razón, / sin ver que sois la ocasión / de lo mismo que culpáis" (*Sor Juana Anthology* 110) ("Silly, you men -- so very adept / at wrongly faulting womankind, / not seeing you're alone to blame / for faults you plant in woman's mind") (*Sor Juana Anthology* 111). In this poem, she quite strongly and skillfully presents a feminine perspective outright, and discusses the manner in which a man will, on occasion, accuse a woman for something for which he himself has caused. Franco writes that Sor Juana often sought to disrupt "the 'natural' association of women with ignorance and men with learning" (25), as can be seen in this selection. Another way in which Sor Juana examined discursive space was to present "an impersonal subject" (29). Here gender does not necessarily play so strong a role as it does in some of her other writings. In the following extract, Sor Juana discusses a topic which is of tremendous importance to her: music, and it comes from a poem written in celebration of the birthday of the Countess de Galve: "Música. ... Pues una mensura mesma, / aunque a diversos sentidos / determinada, demuestra / la Armonía a los oídos / y a los ojos la Belleza" (*Sor Juana Anthology* 82) ("Music. ... A single measuring rod, / though adapted to the modes / of different senses, demonstrates / Harmony to the ears / and Beauty to the eyes") (*Sor Juana Anthology* 83). This poem represents more of a neutral voice as Sor Juana expresses some of the virtues of music. Yet another approach which Sor Juana incorporated was to take on "a male persona" (Franco 29). This is exemplified in her play, *The Divine Narcissus*, which includes the masculine voice of Narcissus, who represents Christ: "Narciso. Ovejuela perdida, / de tu dueño olvidada, / ¿adónde vas errada? / Mira que dividida / de mí, también te apartas de tu vida" (*Sor Juana Anthology* 154) ("Narcissus. Poor little lost sheep, / forgetful of your Master, / where can you be straying? / When you depart from me, / it's life you leave behind, will you not see?") (*Sor Juana Anthology* 155). This passage can also be affiliated with the Church, as the Master addresses his "poor little lost sheep." Since the Church is one of the suitable topics of discourse, she is well within the expectations of her culture, and yet is able to express a point of view via a male character.

In fact, all of the above passages can be associated with either the court, the Church, or both. The previous passage on music, for example, can be connected to the court and Church, since music was utilized in both settings. Thus, Sor Juana was successful in finding space within the limitations of the period in New Spain, in which discourse needed to deal with the court or the Church. Some of the other ways she expressed herself within such confines was through "the camouflage of allegory, the disguise of parody, mimicry of what was accepted as feminine discourse (obedience, self-denigration)," and "anonymity" (Franco 25). In her plays, she "borrowed the discourse of students and mimicked black, indigenous, and regional speech, thus acquiring a symbolic mobility that enabled her to change her gender, class, and race" (29). Sor Juana also delved into psychological realms, as did Virginia Woolf with her stream-of-consciousness writing. Franco writes that in some cases: "the paradox of Sor Juana's exploration of space is that it must appear to be undertaken in sleep, although it is written by an author who is awake" (38). Sor Juana dealt with some of the intricate phases between consciousness and unconsciousness, but wrote about them when she was awake. For example, in her poem, *El Sueño (First I Dream)*, she writes: "El sueño todo, en fin, lo poseía; / todo, en fin, el silencio lo ocupaba" (*Poems* 84) ("Sleep, in summary, now possessed all things, / all things were now by silence overtaken") (*Poems* 85). She suggests here that sleep, and the silence that accompanies it, has a certain power to take over our rational thoughts, and that through sleep we relinquish some of the control we have over our thinking processes when we are awake. Thus, in sleep, she knowingly enters a room in which the unconscious has power over the conscious. Franco explains: "Her sleep is not a dark night of the soul but the translation of the self into the realm of abstraction" (38). Sor Juana continues: "El alma, pues, suspensa / del exterior gobierno -- en que ocupada / en material empleo, / o bien o mal da el día

por gastado" (*Poems* 88) ("The soul, then, freed from / governing the senses (by which endeavor / and activity it / deems the day is well or poorly spent)" (*Poems* 89). The poet acknowledges here how in sleep "the soul is freed from governing the senses" and how during slumber the unconscious deals with the events of the day. It is interesting to note that she wrote of unconscious space about two hundred years before psychologists formally articulated it. William James, for example, stated: "The discovery that memories, thoughts, and feelings exist outside the primary consciousness is the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science" (qtd. in Humphrey 1).

In conclusion, in her own way Sor Juana succeeded in achieving some of Virginia Woolf's ideals much before Woolf. Woolf writes, for example, that "women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (69). Sor Juana found a field for her efforts and rooms in which to exercise her faculties, both in a literal and metaphorical way. She discovered the neighborhood school, the library of her grandfather, the court, and the convent. At the Convent of Santa Paula, in particular, where she lived her entire adult life, she found creative spaces in her private apartment, the kitchen, the chapel where she sang daily mass, and in other rooms and areas where musical and theatrical performances took place. She also examined the spaces in her own mind, discursive space in conversation and particularly writing, and psychological space in which she acknowledged the control and power of the unconscious. Furthermore, Woolf explains that "it is narrow-minded" (69) to say that women "ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (69). Although Sor Juana was involved with cooking, the playing of musical instruments, and other activities, she was not confined by these activities. They were integrated, in fact, with the deeper meanderings of her mind, and were instrumental in stimulating elevated and sophisticated expression, such as can be found in her poetry and other writings. Daily, routine activities such as ascending a spiral staircase, became potential metaphors for music theory. Cooking with eggs, oil, syrup, and sugar inspired philosophical thoughts. Her mind was constantly at work, perpetually seeking understanding and higher truth, and continuously interrelating the common with the metaphysical. In addition, Woolf writes of women, "It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex" (69). Despite the friction and difficulties she experienced with both the Spanish Inquisition and the male hierarchy to which she was subject, Sor Juana continued forward with academic pursuits throughout most of her life. It was not until the last years of her existence that she discontinued her academic activities and sold her library. David Pasto writes: "Whatever Sor Juana's reasons for renouncing her writing and her studying, she remains a remarkable woman. In an era of strict religious orthodoxy, political repression, and patriarchal culture, she managed to do what few other women of her time could do: she had a career and achieved fame as a poet and dramatist" (*House of Trials* 6). Importantly, Sor Juana's voice has not been silenced. More than three hundred years have passed since her death in 1695, and her writing, ideas, and philosophies speak with conviction and passion. They reveal the genius, intelligence, and creativity of a seventeenth-century woman who succeeded in finding a room of her own.

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Author's profile: Deborah Weagel is working towards her Ph.D. in English literature at the University of New Mexico. Her interests in scholarship include interdisciplinary studies, feminism & gender studies, (auto)biography, and postcolonial studies. Her publications include *Interconnections: Essays on Music, Art, Literature, and Gender* (2004), "Musical and Verbal Counterpoint in *Thirty Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*" in *Word and Music Studies* 7 (Ed. Suzanne M. Lodato and David Francis Urrows, 2005), "Silence in John Cage and Samuel Beckett: 4'33" and *Waiting for Godot*" in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 12 (Ed. Marius Buning, Matthijs Engelberts, and Sjeff Houppermans, 2002), "The Power, Symbolism, and Extension of the Mother in *L'Enfant noir*: A Feminine Portrait by a Masculine Author" in *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 56.1 (2002), and "Musical Counterpoint in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*" in the *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (2001-2002). E-mail: <[dweagel@unm.edu](mailto:dweagel@unm.edu)> & <[dweagel@comcast.net](mailto:dweagel@comcast.net)>.