

RECONSIDERING *SOR JUANA*: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO OCTAVIO PAZ'S INTERPRETATION OF "FIRST DREAM"

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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's (1648-1695) works have come during the past century under close scrutiny by scholars such as poet-laureate Octavio Paz, whose biography *Sor Juana, or the Traps of Faith*, is considered by many scholars to be monumental addition to our understanding of Sor Juana's life, works, and times. The following essay will examine Paz's *Sor Juana* with special attention to his interpretation of "First Dream" in order to expose the implications that Paz's interpretation has placed upon our contemporary view of Sor Juana's life, as well as to provide the reader with critical ways to approach Paz's eclectic biography.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695): "poet," "nun," "epitome of the Baroque," "Tenth Muse," and "Phoenix of Mexico." An enigma in the eyes of scholars, the life of Sor Juana is believed to embody the contradictions of an age. Her life has been the subject of inquiry and interpretation on the part of critics and literati who have attempted to make sense out of the life by peering into her works. During the past fifty years, and after a century or so of neglect, there has been a revival of interest in the writings of this colonial female writer. The interest that began at the turn of the twentieth century continues to this day as feminist critics attempt to appropriate Sor Juana's texts. Sor Juana's life, however, appears to have been a more intriguing subject than the texts themselves, as the many biographies of Sor Juana attest, beginning with Father Diego Calleja's in the year 1700, refined by Dorothy Schons in 1926, psychologically analyzed by the German scholar Ludwig Pfandl, and recently culminating with the publication of Octavio Paz's *Sor Juana, or the Traps of Faith*. Chief among those who would make sense out of the life from the work, Paz continues the fascination with which scholars have been attracted to this female colonial writer. Eclectic in its approach, his work is, as he calls it, "a blend of history, biography, and literary criticism." The work however, seems to attempt to do more than include itself among the biographical studies of Sor Juana. Far from ending at a retelling of Sor Juana's life, Paz extends his inquiry to the history of his Mexican origins, and far from ending in Sor Juana's texts themselves, Paz manages to forge an image of Sor Juana according to his poetic notions. For the reader of Paz's *Sor Juana*, this is a point which calls for an awareness without which the reader may fall, as one scholar has put it, into Paz's trap.¹

Given the influence that Paz's *Sor Juana* has exerted on subsequent Sor Juana criticism since its publication in 1982, and given that most introductory studies on Sor Juana are apt to begin with Paz's work, it is crucial for the reader of Sor Juana texts to be conscious of the ways in which Paz "recreates" the life of this writer.² The reader must be attentive to the fact that his is a "recreation" in the literal sense of the word, that is, a "forming anew" of a life as seen through the eyes of a Mexican poet, a creation that is given new life by words and symbols which this poet believes are most fitting for Sor Juana. This is a point that is not denied by Paz, who states in his prologue that his book "is an attempt at restitution." He states that he hopes to "restore to their world, to seventeenth-century New Spain, Sor Juana's life and work." Likewise, he hopes "Sor Juana's writings can restore her distant world to us, her twentieth century readers. This restitution is historical, relative, and partial..." (7). Paz's introductory statements regarding his work cannot be taken for granted, for not only do they set the stage for the subsequent "recreation" of Sor Juana's life, they remind the reader that Paz's biography is shaped by the precepts of Paz's system of interpretation.

Although Paz early on demarcates the relativity and partiality of his views, the reader, nonetheless, would benefit from approaching Paz's work with a critical eye towards the implications of his "recreation." As such, the following essay attempts to examine underlying motives, assumptions, and claims inherent in Octavio Paz's *Sor Juana*, the awareness of which, it cannot be too emphasized, is a crucial component of a complete understanding of the significance of Paz's work on Sor Juana criticism. The specific emphasis lies on Paz's interpretation of "First Dream," a poem considered by many scholars to be Sor Juana's most ambitious, and one that, according to Paz, expresses Sor Juana's life's passion, namely, the love of knowledge. These initial observations of Paz's book seek not to undermine his contribution or literary expertise, but to bring into awareness the ways through which our understanding of Sor Juana's life and texts may be shaped by external and infringing interpretations, often to the exclusion of alternative viewpoints. The emphasis on Paz's interpretation of "First Dream" is far from arbitrary. A careful reading of Paz's chapter devoted to "First Dream" reveals that his analysis, in its relative significance to the goals of his biography, is an example of the ways through which Paz not only articulates his claims, but also exposes

his assumptions and fulfills his conclusions. As such, this paper is a critique that questions the procedures of a particular scholar in order to find new ways of understanding Sor Juana's life and texts. Above all, it is a reconsideration of the "image" of Sor Juana that has become the result of accumulated criticism, transmitted through Paz, and that in various ways and through various means continues to reflect itself in Sor Juana studies.

In understanding of the ways by which Paz attempts to "restitute" and "re-create" Sor Juana's world, the reader can begin by being aware of the premises under which he performs his analysis of "First Dream." According to Paz, a written work is never an isolated one. He stresses not only the relationship of work "to other works, past and present, that are its models and its rivals," but also the relationship of work to reader (4). Paz's interpretation establishes itself not only as a reading of Sor Juana's "First Dream," but also as the reading through which Sor Juana's life and works will be "re-created," "resolved," and "restituted." Paz also accepts that his reading will not coincide with Sor Juana's original objectives and intentions when he states that "the work shuts out the author and opens to the reader." The reader, we may infer, is Paz himself, who, mostly interested in *his* reading and the observations he derives from it, implies that his work will grant life to Sor Juana's texts when he states that "a work responds to the reader's, not the author's questions." He adds that "once written, the work has a life of its own distinct from that of its author, a life granted by its successive readers" (3). Though he maintains that as readers we are not interested in an author's intentions, he nonetheless grants himself permission to "superimpose" *his* interpretation. Paz's attempt at "restitution" is an "answering" of the questions he deems fit to "ask" Sor Juana texts. From the beginning he then seems to implicitly state that his readings will depend on the questions he asks; the questions, in turn, will "respond." It is necessary at the prologue that the reader keep in mind such questions, what type they are, how they are asked, what is implied by the way they are asked, what answers they are seeking, and to what purpose, if any, for these are the questions that shape the "response," the interpretation of "First Dream," and by extension, the "re-created" image of Sor Juana.

What, then, are the questions Paz asks of "First Dream," and what are "First Dream's" "responses"? In other words, how does Paz "read" the poem? A reading of Paz's chapter on "First Dream" reveals that this is Paz's mode of interpretation. Implicit though they are, the questions are nonetheless the guiding principle that shapes Paz's analysis of the poem. The main question that Paz attempts to answer is "what is the significance and place of [Sor Juana's] "First Dream" in the history of poetry?" (2). Paz's analysis of "First Dream" begins first and foremost with this question in mind. Most other inquiry into the poem's history, structure, and relevance to a "re-creation" of Sor Juana's life serves to answer this question. As the question suggests, Paz attempts to find in "First Dream" those aspects of the poem that make it worthy of consideration, that is, those aspects of the poem that make it unique, original, distinct. Paz limits himself towards this end when he poses such questions as: is "First Dream" a mere imitation of Gongora's "Solitudes," the poem traditionally believed to have been the model of "First Dream?" Who influenced the making of "First Dream?" That is, to what literary tradition does "First Dream" belong? How original is "First Dream" when compared to the poetry of other major Spanish Golden Age poets? In other words, how is "First Dream" distinct from other baroque poetry? What is the substance of "First Dream," and how does it depart from the genre to which it belongs? Above all, where does "First Dream" break with tradition, and most importantly, what does this reveal about Sor Juana's life and person?

A reconsideration of Paz's analysis of "First Dream" demands that we first delve into an examination of the tradition to which Paz, as a Mexican poet, belongs to and from which he reads "First Dream," as well as the ends he seeks to attain in "re-creating" the life of Sor Juana. Frederick Luciani informs us that "Paz belongs to a distinguished tradition that includes Amado Nervo, Pedro Salinas, and Gabriela Mistral" (Luciani 5). It is a tradition of "poet/critic/biographer" that Luciani says begins with the first biographer of Sor Juana, Father Diego Calleja. To this tradition Paz has not only included himself but attempted to finally "resolve" the "enigma that is Sor Juana," by "filling in the gaps," as he describes his purpose. Luciani adds to our understanding of this tradition by imparting that Father Calleja's biography

...is also the primordial example of the biographical thrust of the bulk of Sor Juana studies. It initiates the long tradition of performing biographical readings of the content of Sor Juana's poetry, and, indeed, deriving a kind of biographical archetype from the very *form* of Sor Juana's poetry. That is, Sor Juana is seen by Calleja and his generation as a living trope, an emblem with occult meanings, a literary figure who is literally a *figure*. (10)

Luciani's observations point to a tradition that, as mentioned previously, attempts to "re-create" a life by peering into the work. The texts themselves serve as evidence of a biographer's interpretation. Paz and critics of his book are well aware that this kind of biographical "thrust" risks committing a biographical fallacy which Luciani describes as

“a kind of bio-literary displacement of textual authority,” that is, a displacement where texts are “based on texts, based on the original text [in this case Sor Juana’s], whose truth is supposed to be uncontested” (11). As critics of Paz point, Paz grounds himself in this mode of biographical study. Among other biographers in this tradition stands Ludwig Pfandl, whom Paz describes as being “at the opposite pole” of Sor Juana’s biographers because of his psychoanalytic rendering of Sor Juana’s life (*Sor Juana* 3). Paz would place himself in middle ground, neither in the likeness of Father Calleja’s hagiography, nor at an excessively Freudian restoration of Sor Juana’s life.³ This traditional biographical mode of analysis of which Luciani informs us is essential for a critical approach to Paz’s otherwise seemingly impartial biography.⁴

In addition to the “poet/critic/biographer” tradition, Paz also belongs to a tradition of Latin American writers who during their time were attempting to find the roots of their literary origins, to define their identity as Latin American writers, and to come to grips with the neglect with which the North American and European literary world seemed to treat them. Literary historian Andrew Bush informs that from Jorge Luis Borges to Octavio Paz “the leading figures of Spanish American letters in the twentieth century have set their writing in a direct relation to the Baroque” (Bush 375). It was an attempt at “recuperation, if not to say reinvention of colonial letters in our time through the valorization of the *Barroco de Indias*, a period obscured by nearly 200 years of the ideology of independence,” that Bush sees has been beneficial to contemporary criticism (375), but beneficial only in its active resurrection of those texts once considered to be the “epitome of bad taste” and a reflection of tyrannical colonial rule (Echeverría 204). One may wonder whether the renewed interest in the Baroque period of colonial Latin America would not have brought about the revival of the interest in Sor Juana texts. More relevant for the purposes of this paper, however, are Bush’s observations on the “emphasis on baroque ancestry” on the part of Latin American writers such as Paz, who projects this tradition in his book. Paz’s “restitution” of Sor Juana’s world may be seen as a direct descendant of this revival of the *Barroco de Indias*. His “restitution” of Sor Juana’s world to that of the twentieth century’s is an attempt to bridge the gap that separated the colonial baroque literature with that of twentieth century Mexico. Paz writes his biography of Sor Juana, who is considered the “centerpiece” of colonial baroque literature, as a means of creating a direct link to that period, a link that both underlies his biography of Sor Juana and that drives his analysis of “First Dream.”

With this in mind, the reader may also consider the ways in which Paz goes about achieving this link. In his book *Los hijos del limo* [*Children of the Mire*], Paz attempts to define the modern literary period of Spanish America according to his observations of the literary history of that area. His purpose, he states, is “to describe, from the perspective of a Spanish American poet, the modern poetic movement and its contradictory relationships with what we call ‘the modern’” (*Children of the Mire*, v). He contends that because “Spanish America” experienced no Romantic period, there was no modern period in Latin American literary history “until Ruben Darío invented it belatedly under the banner of *Modernismo* [Modernism]” (Bush 376). Paz’s definition of modernity is vaguely summarized in the following statement: “Modernity is a polemical tradition which displaces the tradition of the moment, whatever it happens to be, but an instant later yields its place to still another tradition which in turn is a momentary manifestation of modernity. Modernity is never itself; it is always the other” (*Children of the Mire* 1). According to Paz, “modern poetry has been a reaction against the modern era.” He adds that it “can be seen as the history of contradictory relationships, fascination and repulsion intertwined” (vi-vii). *Children of the Mire*, in establishing a definition of modern poetry as a transgression from tradition, indirectly links modern poetry with that of the colonial baroque, which also “stands as the last truly significant violation of poetic norm” until the modern literary movement (Gonzales Echeverría 195). The critical reader may not find it surprising that this underlying attempt at linking the past to the present permeates Paz’s biography. He “re-creates” a Sor Juana who is ahead of her time, a writer who, as Paz asserts, both ends a tradition and begins a new one. The “poet/critic/biographer” tradition to which Paz belongs as well as his poetic notions of the baroque-modern connection enlighten not only our understanding of Paz’s book as a whole, but also his textual analysis of “First Dream.”

What, then, are Paz’s answers to the questions he poses? In other words, what are his interpretations, claims, and conclusions about the poem? Paz begins his analysis by stating that “First Dream” is “Sor Juana’s most personal poem” (*Sor Juana* 357). He then attempts to dispel the traditional view of “First Dream” as an imitation of the “Solitudes” with the claim that though “First Dream” is indeed a Gongorist poem in its use, for example, of Latinisms and constant mythological references, the differences from Góngora’s “Solitudes” is “greater” (358). Reviewing philosophical, metaphysical, scientific, and Christian texts, he delves into the history of dream literature in order to establish “First Dream” in a direct lineage of the genre that reaches far back into antiquity, claiming that the Hermetic tradition, through Sor Juana’s familiarity with the writings of Athanasius Kircher, was the main

inspiration behind the writing of "First Dream." Paz also emphasizes the need "to underscore Sor Juana's originality," and this he does by recounting the ways in which "First Dream" does not fit the "traditional mold" (361, 365). The first, he states, is a "formal" difference. "First Dream," compared to other such literature that relates the ascent of the soul to the heavens, is not in prose but in poetic form. Because of this, Paz deduces that "First Dream" ... is the allegory of an experience that cannot be encompassed in the space of a single night but spans the many nights Sor Juana spent studying and thinking. The night of the poem is an exemplary night, a night of nights. The complement to "First Dream" is the "Response:" a version of the same theme, the search for knowledge—but over a lifetime, not in the course of a single night. (366)

The second difference, according to Paz, is the "impersonality" of "First Dream." A careful reading of the poem reveals the absence of a personal subject until the very last line when the first instance of an "I" appears. This line has been the subject of inquiry on the part of feminist critics, who tend to see the "yo despierta," or "the feminine 'I'" at the end as evidence of Sor Juana's conscious use of subverting the masculine power structures that traditionally claim the sphere of knowledge (Bergman 159, Merrim 21). For Paz however, the sudden appearance of this feminine subject "in no way alters the impersonality of the poem," but in what appear to be slight Freudian undertones, he describes it as a "break down" at the end (*Sor Juana* 366). More importantly for Paz, the appearance of the "I" shows proof of the confessional nature of the poem, for it reveals that the soul about which we read and which could stand as a universal quest of humankind is actually Sor Juana's. The last difference lies in the fact that, compared to other dream literature, there is no figure that guides the soul in its ascent towards the heavens. This, for Paz, is evidence of an example "of an attitude—the solitary soul confronting the universe—that later, beginning with romanticism, would be the spiritual axis of Western poetry" (367). In short, Paz sees "First Dream" as a "double negation," namely, what he calls the "silence of space," and the "vision of nonvision," in other words, the silence of the soul's solitary quest and the realization of the immensity of the splendor of the universe, respectively. It is here that according to Paz we may find "First Dream's" originality, an originality that Paz sees as showing characteristics of modern poetry.

Thus Paz's second major claim about "First Dream" revolves around "First Dream's" proto-modern characteristics. Herein lies the significance of "First Dream" in the history of poetry according to Paz, a significance that Paz assures the reader "no one has yet understood" (*Sor Juana* 361). The "double negation" which Paz sees as central to the poem's meaning is a paradox "that inaugurates a poetic mode that is central to the modern age; more precisely, a mode that *defines* modern poetry in its most radical and extreme form" (381). The "double negation" in "First Dream" transforms the poem into a "prophecy" of modern poetry, which is also a "double negation," a "criticism and a passion" (*Children of the Mire* 3). In a strikingly similar description of modernity that we can see present in *Children of the Mire*, Paz would convince the reader that "First Dream's" belongs in a such unique place in the history of poetry. He summarizes this claim when he states that "First Dream" is "a baroque poem that negates the baroque, a belated work that prefigures the most modern modernity" (*Sor Juana* 381). Hence "First Dream," like its author, is both a poem written ahead of its times and early for the modern era.

In addition to being proto-modern poem, "First Dream" is read as a true reflection of Sor Juana's lifelong passion, the love of knowledge. As Paz contends,

Although constructed with deliberate and rigorous objectivity, "First Dream" is threaded with personal emotion. The daring of the soul, its ecstasy, its doubts, its vacillations, and the praise of the tragic figure of Phaethon are a true intellectual confession. To confirm this we need only compare the poem with what Sor Juana says in the "Response" about her desire for learning, her psychic wavering, her method of study...In the space of an ideal night, in a consciously abstract manner, Juana Inés recounts her intellectual life. The poem ends inconclusively: the soul does not know what path to choose...The abrupt awakening puts an end to the dream, not to the intellectual adventure of the soul. (*Sor Juana* 378)

Paz informs that such a passion was in Sor Juana's world considered a transgression, a transgression which Paz sees embodied in "First Dream's" reference to the mythological figure of Phaethon. In such an interpretation of "First Dream," however, in its insistent emphasis on a text's direct access to a writer's mental processes, shows not only a continuation of the biographical tradition discussed previously, but also an adaptation of Paz's "re-creation" of Sor Juana to the view that would see Sor Juana as a symbolic figure of transgression and embodiment of the crises and contradictions of her age.

Paz's interpretation of "First Dream" may be summarized as follows: "First Dream" is both an "allegory and confession" that not only reveals Sor Juana's lifelong intellectual passion but also shows proto-modern elements that place it in a unique position in the history of poetry (366). As Stephanie Merrim notes, Paz sees Sor Juana as a

“feminist *avant la garde*” (Merrim 18). Although the reader may infer that this “reading” of “First Dream” is not by all means a definitive one, the reader must be aware of the assumptions underlying such an interpretation. First, as may be induced, Paz’s interpretation assumes that “First Dream” is a true reflection of the historical Sor Juana’s thoughts and desires. This, according to Paz, is “confirmed” by what Sor Juana writes in her “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” [“Answer to Sor Filotea”], which is in turn assumed by some critics to be a true self-confession. In such “bio-literary textual displacement,” as Luciani points out, Paz takes Sor Juana’s words at face value in order to portray “the real Sor Juana” (Luciani 8). Secondly, Paz assumes that the ways in which “First Dream’s” break from tradition gives the poem a modern feel, but one may debate whether “First Dream” breaks with the literary tradition because of its author’s pre-modern sensibilities or because, coincidentally, as some feminist critics such as Merrim are apt to contend, it is the text of a female writer who transforms the literary genre for her own gender-conscious self expression. As Stephen Hart notes in his article “Is Women’s Writing in Spanish America Gender-Specific?” that given the coincidence that “Modernism... offered a vehicle of expression which was more sensitive to the arena of women’s reality (disenfranchisement, isolation, ostracization, silencing, etc.),” are we then to attribute “First Dream’s” break from tradition to Sor Juana’s “gender specific” writing or to any proto-modern sensibilities? (536). The distinction appears to be a challenging question to resolve, but what is relevant here is that Paz’s conclusions regarding “First Dream” may be questioned.

Paz’s “reading” of “First Dream” “superimposes” its own interpretation by means of his explicit but at times limited views, ironically involving itself in the very interpretative process that Paz seeks to avoid. This is a point which critics of Paz have not failed to expose.⁵ It is also a point that the reader must keep in mind when approaching Paz’s analysis, for an awareness of such biographical and literary formulations is crucial if the reader is not to take Paz’s interpretations at face value. For the reader who seeks to find new ways of understanding Sor Juana’s texts, it is imperative to be aware of the implications of Paz interpretations whether for future Sor Juana biographical studies or critical studies of her texts.

Perhaps more important than what Paz asks of Sor Juana’s texts however, are the questions he doesn’t ask. In other words, the reader must also keep in mind that what Paz neglects or leaves out of his interpretations, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is equally significant to the critical reader who seeks to avoid Paz’s “trap.” The reader must be cognizant of the implications of both his explicit claims as well as his implicit silence. In this regard the reader will be applying the same observations to Paz’s book that Paz himself states are crucial for understanding Sor Juana’s life, world, and texts, namely, observations that extract the meaning of the “utterance surrounded by silence” (*Sor Juana* 5). Just as there is a need according to Paz to “include an understanding of what cannot be said” in order to better understand Sor Juana’s work, it is also necessary for the reader of Paz’s book to be aware of what he *doesn’t* say, and what this means for our understanding of both his interpretations and Sor Juana’s texts. The reader may ask of Paz’s interpretation questions such as: Is there a literary tradition of philosophical poetry by female writers that to which Sor Juana may have been exposed? Is “First Dream” a poetic model of humankind’s soul’s solitary quest for knowledge or instead of Sor Juana’s own individual adventure? What are we to make of the presence of the many female mythological figures that Georgina Sabat de Rivers has thoroughly examined, and how do these change our understanding of Sor Juana’s reliance on classical literary models (Sabat de Rivers 142-161)? Is “First Dream” “modern” because of its break from tradition or instead because of its scientific undertones?

A reading of Paz’s interpretation likewise may prompt further questions such as: Can we detach our reading of “First Dream” from the view that sees the significance of the poem as having “modern” sensibilities? Can the reader make sense of a poem such as “First Dream” without a knowledge of the literary background on which the poem grounds itself? Can we as readers transcend a reading of “First Dream” that sees it as a mere “symbolic self-portrait”? Does “First Dream” challenge or perpetuate the male literary tradition from which it apparently stems? Are we to agree thoroughly with Paz’s “re-creation” of Sor Juana as a figure of transgression, a view that some feminists have appropriated, and that is only recently being contested?⁶ The answers to such questions suggest a departure from traditional “readings” of “First Dream” such as Paz’s, and calls for an awareness of the ways in which future readings may implicitly adopt a critic’s claims. Approaching Paz’s interpretation entails not only questioning the very claims he poses that would otherwise set a reading of “First Dream” in stone, but also entails expanding the variety of ways that a poem such as “First Dream” may be read.

A point of departure into alternative readings and a solution to what may otherwise be a mixture of readings of “First Dream” may lie in first distinguishing between three “personas” of Sor Juana that critics seem to intertwine, often confusing the textual voices to which they are referring to the detriment of a clear literary analysis.

The reader must be aware of the difference between the “real” or historical Sor Juana, the “emblematic” Sor Juana, i.e. symbolic figure, and lastly, the Sor Juana which Emilie Bergmann aptly calls the “lyric voice” (Bergmann 161). In a book such as Paz’s that seeks to “re-create” the life by peering into the texts, such distinction is often blurred, and the reader is left to wonder whether Paz refers to the historical person or to his “re-creation.” Such a distinction is crucial if we are to avoid in future readings of Sor Juana texts a “mixing” the genres of biography and textual analysis that Paz relies on and that may create challenges to our interpretation of Sor Juana texts (Luciani 9).

In reading Paz’s book, the reader ought to be aware above all of Paz’s “figure” of Sor Juana. For Paz, Sor Juana transgresses in both her break from the literary tradition and her adventurous pursuit of knowledge. Paz’s interpretation of “First Dream” is a piece of the total “emblem” to which his Sor Juana is made to fit. By asserting Sor Juana’s unique status as reflected in her “First Dream,” Paz contributes to and reinforces our image of Sor Juana as the exceptional “Mexican” nun who embodied contradiction, and who is for Paz “a symbol of her times.” For Paz, this contradiction lies in the type of knowledge Sor Juana pursued and which went against the religious orthodoxy of the period, that is, a philosophical knowledge to which “First Dream” is apparently witness. By referring to “First Dream” as a “symbolic self-portrait,” Paz’s interpretation sees “First Dream” both as a reflection of Sor Juana’s passion, and as a proto-modern poem. Paz’s interpretation of “First Dream” may be said to be itself a “living conceit,” a “metaphor incarnate” that the reader ought to approach with caution and a critical eye. It is hoped that by approaching Paz’s romanticized “re-creation” with an awareness of Paz’s biographical premises, future “readings” of Sor Juana texts steer away not only from accepting interpretations that would attempt to settle those texts according to one biographer’s poetic notions, but also from fictionalizing Sor Juana’s life on the grounds of textual self-confessionary “evidence.” Such a critical stance seems imperative for readers who would “read” Sor Juana texts in and of themselves and without a fabricated image of Sor Juana in the background, the presence or absence of which may or may not allow for the possibility of alternative readings that may in turn direct Sor Juana criticism towards new directions.

¹ Tonia Leon’s incisive article examines the ways in which a reader may be “drawn into” accepting Paz’s interpretations by means of his stylistic poetic language. The reader is asked to keep in mind that Paz is first and foremost a poet.

² Stephanie Merrim notes that, in addition to “restituting” Sor Juana’s works and world to their proper place” and “re-creating” her world, Paz intends “to resolve... [those] issues surrounding Sor Juana’s life, work, and times.” “Restitution,” “resolution,” and “re-creation” are the bases on which Paz’s main goals lie (12). Merrim is a feminist scholar who has pointed out the influence of Paz’s work in Sor Juana criticism in a positive note.

³ Paz makes it clear from the beginning that though “an author’s life and work are related...the relation is never simple. The life does not entirely explain the work, nor the work explain the life. There is something in the work that is not to be found in the author’s life, something we call creativity or artistic and literary invention” (*Sor Juana* 3). Though appearing to steer away from committing the fallacy of interpreting texts based on other texts, he implies that his biographical study, contrary to others before his, will be an attempt to find Sor Juana’s “literary invention.” This, the reader shall see, is the main “thrust” of his analysis of “First Dream,” whereby he aims to find those aspects of “First Dream” that make it original, unique, and significant.

⁴ A point worthy note is that most literature on Sor Juana studies that aims at a biographical rendering derives its information from Sor Juana’s “Answer to Sor Filotea,” Sor Juana’s autobiographical self-defense written in 1690. The reader may notice that even the most recent critical literature on Sor Juana continues this kind of study. Feminist scholars for example, who have since Dorothy Schons publication of “Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” (1926) claimed Sor Juana as the “First Feminist of the Americas” as well as attempted to re-appropriate Sor Juana texts for feminist thought, retain in their critical studies traces of this tradition (Merrim 182).

⁵ See Tonia Leon’s aforementioned article as well as Frederick Luciani’s “Octavio Paz on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: The Metaphor Incarnate” for two examples of this type of critical assessment.

⁶ See Licia Fiol-Matta’s article for a non-traditional feminist interpretation of Sor Juana’s “First Dream”.

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