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Gender and Aesthetics?: Two Translations of *La Respuesta*

In 1994 Electra Arenal and Amanda Powell released a critical edition of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's famous *La Respuesta*, entitled *The Answer/La Respuesta*. Their proposal was to focus, for the first time, on issues of gender in the nun's famous letter. The result is an unequalled edition of Sor Juana's famous reply that is situated historically and annotated exhaustively, always emphasizing gender issues in Sor Juana's text. The goals of their critical edition are to "do justice" to the letter by appreciating the socio-political context in which Sor Juana produced her celebrated document, while simultaneously maintaining the rich ambiguities of her letter intact. The two editors identify Sor Juana as a feminist before her time, yet warn that championing her as a feminist may result in obscuring her "greatness as an artist." The editors' preface, introduction, and annotations serve to orient the reader towards a feminist interpretation of Sor Juana's text. Therefore, it seems reasonable to ascertain whether Arenal and Powell's translation conveys feminist characteristics already present in the text or whether it projects upon the document a feminist perspective. A male translator, Alan Trueblood, if compared line-by-line to the feminist version, may bring to the foreground the feminist nature of Arenal and Powell's translation. At the same time, in the context of reader-response theory, Trueblood's translation may reveal the true necessity for women-centered translations. Translation theory will be consulted to situate the two translations within a theoretical framework, namely George Steiner's *After Babel*, Fredrich Schleiermacher's essay "On Different Methods of Translation," and Jorge Luis Borges' conception of translation. Finally, in the light of these theoretical considerations, twelve passages will be analyzed in order to identify the feminist nature of the translation to determine if Arenal and Powell successfully achieve their stated goals of focusing on gender, maintaining the text's ambiguities, and not reducing the text's multiplicities into a fixity.

George Steiner's book, *After Babel*, is certainly a permanent fixture in the realm of translation and translation theory. His first contention postulates that all acts of communication are translations. According to Steiner, to understand is to decipher, thus interpretation is translation and vice-versa. From this position, he is able to muse about how intra-lingual translation comment on the nature of language it-

self. Steiner makes important observations about the constantly evolving flux of language and asks the provocative question - do languages actually entropy? He believes that a text is inherently a prisoner to its historical context and must not be removed from it. When we read, we reconstruct the world the author has created, thus we interpret: "When we read or hear any language statement from the past . . . we translate" (28). Although we may not be conscious of it, we translate in our own language in order to make sense out of the world. This internal interpretation, in fact, guarantees the importance and continued existence of art and literature.

The artistic nature of translations is fundamental for Steiner, even though, paradoxically, man has attempted to define translation in scientific terms. The result in his chapter entitled "Claims of Theory" is that very few "original and significant ideas" exist and those that do can be divided into two general camps- literal and free translation. From these two camps, one can formulate three broad categories, literalism, autonomous restatement, and interpretative parallelism. Literalism connotes a word-by-word matching of the original, autonomous restatement is faithful to the original, while accommodating the text to the translator's tongue in a natural manner, and interpretative parallelism contains the most "wobble room." Paraphrasing seems to be the accepted middle ground of interpretative parallelism, a balance between a faithful rendition of the original without strictly following it, thus allowing the translator a limited free range. This concept of free range or interlinearity proposes the ideal in translation: a translation that is so good that it takes the place of the original. Here, Nietzsche's statement that "to translate is to conquer" is applicable. Translation can be seen as a process of interpretation, appropriation, and re-creation of the source text. Despite the interpretive nature of translations, translators rarely receive recognition for their work, the translators of Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Kant are unidentifiable. Instead, Steiner warns that no theory of translation should be considered scientific: "What we are dealing with is not a science, but an exact art" (311).

The artistic nature of translations complements what Steiner affirms in Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Task of the Translator" as an epistemological drive inherent to the human condition even if man should prove unable to translate certain linguistic creations (*Illuminations* 70). However, not everything is necessarily translatable now, but may be revealed as time passes and one obtains more knowledge: "there are texts which cannot *yet* translate but which may, through linguistic changes, through a refinement of interpretive means, through shifts in receptive sensibility, become translatable in the future" (*After Babel* 262).

Steiner states that there is no definitive moment of understanding, one moment in which the original language and the language of destination are fixed in one place.

Fredrich Schleiermacher's contribution to translation theory "On the Different Methods of Translation" has been considered one of the most important essays on translation. Schleiermacher recognizes the existence of two methods of translation, imitation and periphrastic, but rejects both as insufficient. Paraphrase reflects the content but not the form of the original. At the same time, imitation may duplicate the form, but misses the spirit of the original. The choice between the two methods appears to be equally undesirable. Schleiermacher proposes that the only two reasonable options - either to produce a translation that is reader-friendly or text-friendly: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (9). The two options are mutually exclusive and produce highly disparate results. The reader-friendly option has dominated modern translations, while the text-friendly translation is commonly avoided due to its difficulty to execute and read. The first option presents the text as if the author had written the original in the target language, whereas the second option is an attempt by the translator to convey the essence of the source text while remaining faithful to its foreignness. By proffering a text-friendly translation, Schleiermacher is actually defending an assimilation of the foreignness of a distant culture. A translator should bend his language to reflect the "foreign likeness" of the original and in doing so, the translator positively influences his own language and his own culture:

Our nation may be destined . . . to carry all the treasures of foreign arts and scholarship, together with its own, in its language, to unite them into a great historical whole . . . whatever beauty the most different times have brought forth can be enjoyed by all people, as purely and perfectly as is possible for a foreigner. (29)

Translation, then, becomes at once a confronting experience that makes one reconsider one's way of thinking and an enriching cultural exchange that teaches and affirms that which one already knows about themselves, i.e. the limits and shapes of our mental world are defined by means of our confrontation with the other. Translation becomes a metaphor for uniting while respecting cultural differences, seeing the world through a different lens, recognizing the other's otherness while engendering an opportunity to better understand one's own culture.

Jorge Luis Borges' theory of translation purports a much less uto-

pian view of translation than Schleiermacher's. Efraín Kristal addresses Borges' approach to translation in his paper entitled, "Borges y la traducción." Kristal asserts that translation is one of the major themes, if not one of the most explicit that runs throughout Borges' work. According to Kristal, Francis W. Newman and Matthew Arnold's famous polemic concerning the translation of Homer's *Iliad* inspired Borges' approach to translation. Newman supported a literal translation semantically faithful to the original, whereas Arnold assailed him for producing the inevitable cacophony that results from a literal translation. Arnold was convinced that a faithful translation required certain omissions and rewordings to make it more fluid and clear. Kristal points out that Borges did not consider these two approaches mutually exclusive, rather he adopted both, simultaneously. Borges insisted that both methods, literal and periphrastic, created necessary and fascinating results. Literal translations produce new, but unexpectedly fantastic cacophonous results for the document. Periphrastic translation by being so free of the original also brings life to the original that wasn't previously present. This recasting of the original brings a sense of creativity to the "task of the translator." For Borges, all the great metaphors of literature have already been exhausted, i.e. dream/life, dream/death, etc. In fact, in Borges' book of *Imaginary Beings*, he laments mankind's lack of creativity and imagination, suggesting that little is left for the modern writer to accomplish.

This skeptical perspective on literature identifies the great necessity for translation as an outlet for creativity. Borges' theory of translation seemed to favor the periphrastic method - he aggressively rewrote, reworded, and simply removed entire sections of text. Also, he addresses the same issues of the author's intentions, suggesting that the translator has a privileged perspective that can allow him to intuit the author's original intention better than he/she could have. In other words, the translator can and should improve upon the text he/she translates. Borges emphatically asserted that every writer creates his own precursor. He makes this statement in an essay on Kafka, who influenced some of Borges' literary themes. In fact, Borges was the first Latin American writer to translate Kafka's short stories into Spanish. Paradoxically, Borges stated on a variety of occasions that he only possessed two short stories that were Kafkaesque ("The Lottery of Babylon" and "The Library of Babel") but they were, according to him, perhaps his worst stories. We know these short stories to be some of his most brilliant work, so we must ask ourselves why does he so thoroughly downplay Kafka's influence on his writing?

Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* can begin to explain this phe-

nomenon. Bloom's theory addresses the overwhelming influence a writer feels when confronted with predecessors like Milton and Shakespeare. A strong writer must survive this encounter and misread his precursor's text as a defensive measure that leads one to depose their predecessor. A strong writer is able to break free of the orbit of his predecessor and does it convincingly enough so that the reader attributes certain stylistic qualities of a text to the strong writer instead of the original text. Borges, being a strong writer, intuitively grasps Bloom's "anxiety of influence" in his essay entitled, "Kafka y sus precursores." Here, Borges utters one of his most famous lines, a line that perhaps inspired Harold Bloom's formulation of his theory, "El hecho es que cada escritor crea a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro" (*Obras Completas* 712). It becomes clear that, according to Borges, one can appropriate the text of one's predecessor so well that our perception of the past and the future are irreparably modified. Borges' approach to translation is a critical, editorial approach that cannibalizes the original text and recasts it into the light of the translator's perception of the author's original intent.

By imposing one's interpretation of the author's original intent, the strong writer/translator inscribes his/her own intonation on the original, taking significant liberties with the translation. Jean Paris' article, "Translation and Creation" laments that translation is often executed in an exaggerated manner - either it is too literal or too free. Paris affirms that translating a text is not a passive occurrence, but rather an intimate exchange that is more critical than one might think: "a good translator must be a critic, an analyst as well as a linguist and a poet, too" (*Craft and Context in Translation* 62). Paris also states that the translator must maintain the "original spirit" of the text, "it may well happen that the translated poem is better than the original, more revealing, closer to the Ideal" (63). The "Ideal" is an aesthetic perfection, the culmination of a semi-mystical union of translator and text. However, none of this perfection is even obtainable until the translator breaks free of his/her "anxiety of influence." To do so one must misread or critically assess the original text. Smith Palmar Bovie points out in his essay, "Translation as a Form of Criticism" the critical nature of translation: "Criticism reveals itself (1) in the translator's kinship with his author, (2) in the irreversible decision he makes to take possession of his original, and (3) in the techniques used to implement that decision" (50). The translator, in effect, must overcome his "anxiety of influence" and possess the original through a Bloomian misreading that results in a creative assimilation and subsequent appropriation of the original text. It is in this context that we can understand

Borges' famous quip - "the original is unfaithful to the translation."

In reality, Borges performs an anthropophagy of the original text, consuming it and recasting it in his personal intonation. The result of his aggressive editorial forays, i.e. breaking up long-winded sentences, reordering phrases within a sentence, inserting paragraph breaks, and re-titling short stories, is that Borges assimilates his predecessor to such a degree that the reader begins to attribute some of Kafka's original literary achievements to Borges himself. Borges, although only a translator, seems to be more Kafkaesque than Kafka in his Spanish translations of the German's work. Suddenly, Kafka's preoccupation with infinity seems to be a Borgesian concept rather than an appropriation of a Kafkaesque theme. Literary techniques and themes that had previously been overly influential have been completely recast in a light that attributes these themes to Borges and not his predecessor, Kafka.

In the realm of reader-response, feminist scholars claim that their predecessors have not considered them at all in the formulation of their theories. In order to situate properly two translations by individuals of different gender, one must consider how men and women "read" a text, and how that reading affects their translation of a text. A feminist reader-response theory does not assume that all readers approach a document in the same manner. The feminist perspective starts out by simply asserting that men and women "read" in different manners.

Patrocinio P. Schweickart's article, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," maintains that reader-response theory is woefully inadequate in addressing issues of race, class, and sex (*Gender and Reading* 35). In other words, in a patriarchal world, one cannot presuppose that texts are gender-neutral, but rather issues of gender and politics must be addressed: "For feminists, the question of *how* we read is inextricably linked to *what* we read" (40). Schweickart declares that feminist scholarship must confront the literary canon and expose how male-dominated texts oppress women readers, forcing them to conform to male perspectives, or to read as a man would. Schweickart proclaims that the reading experience for men affirms their own identity in a male-dominated world: "For the male reader, the text serves as the meeting ground of the personal and the universal. Whether or not the text approximates the particularities of his own experience, he is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity. The male reader feels his affinity with the universal . . . precisely because he is male" (41). This type of male-centered reading experience results in an *immascultation* of women readers that pits women against themselves: "It solicits her complicity in the elevation of male difference into universality and, accordingly, the denigration of female difference

into otherness without reciprocity" (42). In other words, the literary canon reproduces a patriarchal view of reality that helps to reinforce misogyny.

Due to this tendency to force women to read as men, Schweickart issues a call-to-arms to revise the literary canon into a feminist perspective and reject the male oriented perspective of the "canon." However, more interesting, perhaps, is Schweickart's consideration of feminists reading women's writing. Here, she declares that women who read women's texts are getting to know the "voice" of the author, understanding her, embodying the author's message. To read as a woman is to bring the text to life, making the author live in the present and consequently, to "connect" with a community of like-minded women: "feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need 'to connect,' to recuperate, or to formulate - they come to the same thing - the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women" (48). Yet, feminist readings must honor the autonomy of the text, respecting it without appropriating its meaning. However, Schweickart also recognizes a tendency towards the subjectivity of a reader and warns, "the reader also has her own premises. To forget these is to run the risk of imposing them surreptitiously on the author" (54). She accepts that reading is subjective and suggests that reading may be a form of interpretation, whose "validity is contingent on the agreement of others" (56). In other words, feminists can create their own interpretations in a community of other women who either confirm or deny certain woman-centered interpretations.

Having appropriately reviewed some of the major theoretical documents on translation and simultaneously taken gender into consideration through reader-response theory, we can approach the two disparate translations of *La Respuesta*. Electra Arenal and Amanda Powell translated this famous document in a critical/feminist edition in 1994, while a male, Alan Trueblood, translated the same document in 1988. The two translations are significantly different and the goal of this paper is to deduce how both translations affect our reading of the text. Trueblood's translation is being used as a point of reference that serves by comparison to identify the feminist qualities of Arenal and Powell's translation. Yet, while serving as a reflection of the feminist critical edition of Sor Juana, the comparison may also expose a male-dominated perspective of the text.

In their preface, the editors of the feminist perspective state their intentions: "The translation that follows is the first English version of the *Respuesta* to focus, as Sor Juana does in the original, on gender. A

major objective is to do justice by means of our introduction, annotations, and the translation itself, to its complexity of thought" (*The Answer/La Respuesta* viii). The editors reflect one of the major tenets of feminism, i.e. that a text cannot be considered as autonomous of the social, historical, and cultural context in which it was produced. Gender, therefore, is an extremely justifiable frame of reference since Sor Juana's gender seriously affected her intellectual production. After all, *La Respuesta* was a response to a male authority, thinly disguised as a woman, attempting to silence Sor Juana for her presumptuousness: "Letters that breed arrogance God does not want in women. But the Apostle does not reject them so long as they do not remove women from a position of obedience. No one could say that study and learning have caused you to exceed your subordinate status" ("Admonishment: The Letter of Sor Philothea de la Cruz," trans. Trueblood). This sentence alone embodies the church's patriarchal position in relation to Sor Juana's attempts at intellectual expression. It appears that gender is very much an issue in *La Respuesta*. Yet, it is not the translation alone that establishes a feminist perspective in Arenal and Powell's critical edition, but rather their historical introduction and their voluminous annotations that orient the reader towards a certain reading of Sor Juana's *La Respuesta*.

Along with the feminist perspective of the editors' introduction and annotations, Arenal and Powell define Sor Juana as a feminist before her time. They state Sor Juana's writing must be considered in the context with other writing women of her era, while also being cognizant of the fact that Sor Juana entered an already present debate concerning women's equality in Letters. More importantly, according to Arenal and Powell, Sor Juana's arguments were intended for other women: "Because she wrote as a woman aware of her gender status and because she intended her arguments to be applied on behalf of other women as *women*, she is certainly a precursor to worldviews and activities we call feminist" (ix). The editors appear convinced that these historical facts justify their feminist reading of *La Respuesta*. However, the preface warns that to champion Sor Juana in our Anglo-American culture may diminish other important aspects of her work. Paradoxically, the editors claim that to misunderstand the context in which Sor Juana wrote and disregard her ambiguities is not to do justice to the text: "To do otherwise mistranslates the author's multiplicities into a fixity" (ix). Yet, is it possible that by fixating on the feminist aspects of *La Respuesta*, one diminishes other aesthetic aspects of the text?

Arenal and Powell begin to create their own feminist aesthetics by contextualizing Sor Juana's life in a historical introduction. This

introduction is extremely important for the twentieth century reader unfamiliar with the seventeenth century. Yet, rather than give an overall historical perspective of Sor Juana's times, the editors immediately focus on the oppression of women: "At every turn, from her courtly and learned yet marginalized standpoint, she contradicted - or deconstructed - artistic, intellectual, and religious views that would refuse her and others like her to express themselves" (1). Although this statement appears to be true, terms like "deconstructed" project a twentieth century viewpoint on Sor Juana, while also serving to immediately frame Sor Juana's life in politically, gendered terms. The editors' introduction is not objective, but rather critically assesses Sor Juana's writing within a feminist perspective:

Living in a world of real and verbal mirrorings, conscious of the specular role assumed involuntarily by women, Sor Juana crafted poetic mirrors and lenses that continue to reveal the submerged realities of her times. Her work reflects how actively the masculine culture assigned women secondary, invisible, silently reflective roles in society. (15)

Simply put this type of statement orients the reader towards a feminist reading, under the supposition of revealing an inherent truth concerning Sor Juana's reality. According to the editors, the twentieth century reader understands the various level of meanings, while concurrently perceiving the discourse as an "(en)gendered process . . . We have learned, as she did, to cross boundaries and read between the lines" (21). Yet despite this fact, two pages later the editors seem to want to "explain away" any inconsistencies in the feminist theme, particularly in the area of "Religious Epistolary Address." Here the translators excuse Sor Juana's self-deprecating style, known as false humility, as reflecting "conventions of the age, standard modes of address . . . and courtly manners of a highly stratified colonial society" (23). Sor Juana not only uses false humility as a social convention, but also brandishes it as a weapon of irony against Sor Philotela. So, on one hand the editors assert that the modern day reader can discern Sor Juana's feminist characteristics on his/her own, but on the other hand, they choose to properly contextualize her self-deprecating style in order to avoid misunderstandings that could reveal anomalies in a feminist approach to Sor Juana.

In the case of false humility, the editors appear to be heavy-handed in their attempt to situate Sor Juana within a feminist context while ignoring her aesthetic accomplishments. Although the editors' introduction helps illuminate the text, one must ask themselves does it serve to contextualize the entire translation in a feminist light? Finally, by

claiming on the back cover of the book to be the "first accurate" translation, one must consider the degree to which the preface and the introduction serve to mold a certain perspective of Sor Juana that, in effect, limits a whole reading of *La Respuesta*.

If one considers the preface and the introduction as a feminist bookends constructed around this famous text, one may begin to identify the feminist characteristics of this particular translation. And to do so, a male translator, Alan Trueblood, has been chosen to serve as a comparison between a politically charged translation by two women and an apparently politically neutral translation by a man. Reader-response theory will help to determine the effectiveness of Arenal and Powell's stated goal of "doing justice" to the original document, while simultaneously exposing Trueblood's perspective as male-centered and far from being politically neutral. Also, the stated desire to "preserve the meaningful ambiguities" and maintain the document's multiplicity must be addressed. First of all, from a comparison standpoint the two translations on the surface appear completely different. It is absolutely amazing that two translators of an extremely long text, 1440 lines, can almost never agree on the same translation for the same line of text. In fact, a mere five sentences are translated exactly the same. This amazing dissimilarity may point towards a conscious dialogue with other male-centered translations.

This study will limit itself to identifying these dialogues when conceptual differences in one translation deliver a message that is completely distinct from the other translation. Arenal and Powell seem to stick more faithfully to the original syntax and paragraph structure of the original text, whereas Trueblood tends to re-order the long sentences and dissect the original document with paragraph breaks. Arenal and Powell provide the reader with unparalleled annotations, 260 to be exact, which clarify the historical background of the text. At the same time, Trueblood offers the reader only 44 annotations, 1/6th of which points out errors, and/or misquotes committed by Sor Juana. Out of 1400 lines of text, only sixty sentences contain noticeable discrepancies, or 4% of the text, and only twenty-three display major discrepancies, or 2% of the entire text. Of the twenty-three differences that reveal a feminist perspective, six are encountered in the first sixty lines, when Sor Juana expresses her "false humility" towards Sor Philotela de la Cruz. Three are found in the mid-hundreds when Sor Juana first defends herself and her writing from outside attacks with three discrepancies in the 800s where Sor Juana describes her uncontrollable epistemological drive. The rest of the discrepancies occur throughout the text, but they reveal themselves at pivotal moments in

the text where gender and Sor Juana's right to intellectual expression are defended. The twenty-three variances can be divided into three broad categories, (1) a feminist recasting of the original text, (2) a change of emphasis which tends towards a collective rather than an individual conception of the world, (3) omissions of two sentences left out of the translation, both by Arenal and Powell, which may impart the ideological position of the translators. Although the male translation serves as a mirror to reflect the feminist elements of the text, its anomalies reveal as much about the translator's male perspective as they do about the women-centered translation.

The very first line in Arenal and Powell's translation exposes their ideological tendency to recast the original text into a feminist form. In this sentence Sor Juana alludes to her "justo temor" in replying to Sor Philotela. Arenal and Powell translate this sentence as "rightful fear," Trueblood, does so as "legitimate timidity." Both get it right to a certain degree, the feminist translation by focusing on perturbation, alludes to a force outside of Sor Juana imposing a certain fear on her and, consequently, Sor Juana is justified in her reticence. Trueblood correctly intuits an employment of false humility; yet his use of "timidity" suggests that Sor Juana is to blame, a timid person cowers and is dominated by the world around him/her. A major theme in the feminist translation emphasizes forces outside of Sor Juana's that control and oppress her. This kind of translation, surely, is trying to bring to the forefront the patriarchal forces that weighed so heavily on Sor Juana's literary production. The male translation, however, seems to constantly attribute blame to Sor Juana, insinuating a certain weakness on her part.

The next discrepancy exposes this same kind of imposition of a feminist perception of reality. The original phrase addresses Sor Juana's inability to respond to Sor Philotela: "tropezar mi torpe pluma" (Line 3). The feminist perspective translates the phrase as "my dull pen stumbling." "Stumbling" suggests a physical barrier that impedes progress, i.e. an "immasculating" object, to use Schweickart's term. Trueblood translates the sentence as "my bungling pen." Once again, "bungling" connotes a certain inadequacy or idiocy on Sor Juana's part. The agency is reflected on to Sor Juana which contrasts significantly with the feminist translation that identifies a physical, outside barrier that attempts to prohibit women writers. In line 15, Sor Juana expresses her concern that a draft of her writing was published without her consent. The original phrase is: "mis borrones." Arenal and Powell translate it as "drafts and scratches," Trueblood sees it as "poor scribbings." "Drafts and scratches" proffers a work-in-progress that could have been im-

proved if given the opportunity. "Poor scribblings" imputes a certain value judgment on Sor Juana's writing. No doubt, Trueblood is trying to be faithful to the concept of "false humility," but his translation exhibits his own inability to understand the implications of living in a world fraught with sexism.

In line 807, Sor Juana describes a situation in which due to a stomach ailment, she was prohibited to study. However, her curious nature was so vehement that it taxed her health more than studying. Sor Juana comments: "se redujeron a concederme que leyese." The feminist translation, "they were compelled to let me read," indicates that Sor Juana's own personal strength overwhelmed the doctors and forced them into submission. This kind of recasting changes the entire sentence in which Arenal and Powell translate the sentence literally to remove the doctors, who were certainly men, out of the picture and, thus, achieve their submission to Sor Juana. Trueblood's translation indicates the doctors "agreed reluctantly to allow me to read." Here Trueblood translates "se redujeron" not as submission, but the polar opposite, the doctors have the power to agree, against their better judgment, to "allow" her to read.

Another example of a feminist recasting of the original occurs when Sor Juana employs false humility in line 955: "de escribir con ambición codicia." Arenal and Powell rewrite the phrase inserting "jealous aspiration." Trueblood, also, mistranslates it as "driving ambition." The feminist translation attempts to tone down the false humility of the phrase, while the male-centered translation had previously attributed weakness on the part of Sor Juana's writing, now implies that Sor Juana's character is overwhelmingly ambitious. This duplicitous perspective of women seems to reflect Trueblood's inability to approach this text in a way that allows him to sympathize, or as Schweickart would say, 'to connect' with the author. Instead he employs his own patriarchal views of the world, or as Schweickart perceives it, he must do a misreading of the text because in reading a text for women, a man must confront himself.

Finally, Arenal and Powell rewrite yet another example of false humility when Sor Juana states: "Confieso desde luego mi ruindad y vileza." The feminist translation diminishes the richness of the text when they translate: "I confess straightway my rough and uncouth nature." "Rough and uncouth nature" is a bold re-inscription of meaning on the phrase. Arenal and Powell choose to reinterpret the phrase in a totally different light, shrinking its original meaning. Trueblood, on the other hand, goes for a literal translation that misunderstands the false humility inherent in the phrase and attributes a deficiency in

Sor Juana's character: "I readily confess that I am base and vile." This translation seems equally unacceptable since it insinuates a value judgment on Sor Juana as a person and disregards the rich ambiguity of her 'false humility.'

In the second set of feminist recastings of the original text, we encounter a group of translated sentences that are inherently ambiguous and neutral in Spanish, but in English a personal pronoun is added to clarify them. The feminist translations defer directly to Schweickart's essay in which she states that "gynocritics" must develop a sense of community among women by analyzing other women's writing. In the editors' translations, a change of emphasis refocuses the reader's gaze to a collective perspective of reality. In line 31, Sor Juana compares her inability to respond to Sor Philotela's admonishment with Mother Mary's response to John the Baptist: "entorpeció el entendimiento, se le suspendió el discurso." Arenal and Powell maintain the impersonal nature of the phrase by stating: "her powers of mind were dulled and her speech halted." Trueblood translates it as "her mind went blank and words failed her." Here the feminist version seems to remain faithful to the impersonal nature of the phrase and thus maintaining its ambiguities, while the male translation attributes an inability to speak to a weakness on Sor Juana's part.

Arenal and Powell seem to be in constant dialogue with the male translation's tendency to attribute such weaknesses to Sor Juana. In the following two different discrepancies, the feminist translation takes impersonal terms and transports them to reflect a collective female reality. The original emphasizes the important role of the daughters of Zion played in witnessing his crucifixion: "la misma Vida" (Line 663). This phrase in the feminist translation reflects a collective identification of women/nuns with the daughters of Zion: "Our very Life." As a male, this kind of group identification is incomprehensible and Trueblood translates the phrase literally as: "the very Life." The second example of this tendency to transmit a collective identification is found in a passage which is extremely ambiguous in meaning. In line 147 Sor Juana addresses how she could be worthy of analyzing the sacred verses: "¿Cómo me atreviera yo a tomarlo en mis indignas manos, repugnándolo el sexo, la edad, y sobre todo las costumbres?" Arenal and Powell translate the phrase in this manner: "Then how should I dare take up in my unworthy hands when sex, and age, and above all, our customs oppose it." Trueblood translates the same passage as: "Then how should I dare to take this into my unworthy hands, when my sex, age, and especially my way of life oppose it." Both translations seem to indicate a necessity to take an impersonal sentence and

place personal pronouns in the sentence to clarify who is the subject of the sentence. Neither translator choose to maintain the neutrality of the sentence, rather the feminists insert "our customs" and maintain the impersonal nature of the first half of the sentence. Of course, "our" metamorphosizes the meaning from an ambiguous personal to a defined collective. This defined collective is not present in the original and is certainly imposed on the original. Yet, at the same time, the original wording does leave the matter open to interpretation. Meanwhile, Alan Trueblood also projects a male perspective when he translates it as "my sex . . . my way of life." Trueblood attributes a personal responsibility for SJ's actions; it is *her* way of life that opposes writing about the Scriptures. "Way of life" also suggests a conscious choice by Sor Juana to be unworthy. The feminist translation inserts "our customs" which implies something imposed, i.e. the customs, that "we" as women must endure collectively.

This tendency to convey a sense of a collective destiny could be the motivating factor in Arenal and Powell's decision to omit two sentences in their translation. The first appears to be inconsequential, a result of removing a redundancy concerning man's rejection of Christ. The sentences states that men renounced Christ because of His miracles: "Así lo testificaron ellos mismos." Trueblood translates it literally as "so they themselves attest." One must ask why do Arenal and Powell, who stay so faithful to the original throughout, yet suddenly omit an entire sentence? Are Arenal and Powell resisting the collective "ellos" which includes and obfuscates the presence of women? The second example on line 532 seems to be clearer. In this passage Sor Juana laments human nature's tendency to pull down those who are successful and the Athenian law that served to ban those who achieve fame: "parece máximo del impío Maquiavelo: que aborrecer al que se señala porque desluce a otros. Así sucede y así sucedió siempre." The last sentence of the former passage is omitted by Arenal and Powell, and on the surface, it would seem to affirm a feminist perspective which identifies oppressive patriarchal tendencies. Yet, interestingly enough, the omission seems to reflect a desire to revise the text and purge it of any illusions of primacy the text may have in today's world. In other words, one discovers a revisionist feminist perspective that dislikes the presence of "siempre" or always. Removing "always" appears to be a revisionary tactic that states: "those days are over."

Clearly, these two editors have executed an excellent translation of *La Respuesta* and have annotated this document in a manner that will certainly survive for future generations to consult. The question remains, however, have they achieved the very goals they themselves

purport in their preface and shouldn't their translation be judged by their own criteria? Indubitably, Arenal and Powell have accomplished their goal of refocusing this famous essay under a feminist light. When exposed to their introduction, their translation, and their annotations, one cannot help but "read" Sor Juana's reply within a different frame of reference, a frame of reference that emphasizes gender and politics. As Schweickart states in her article, gender and politics are inseparable from a woman's reality, therefore a woman's perspective will effect her reading of a document and her translation of that text. Schweickart states that women as readers attempt to understand the "voice" of the author, and "connect" with the author, thus making the text come alive. According to Schweickart's criterion, Arenal and Powell have successfully brought Sor Juana's feminist voice to the foreground.

Yet, Schweickart herself states that "gynocritics" should approach texts by respecting their autonomy and not appropriating their meaning or imposing a certain ideological perspective on the author. To ignore gender and politics, according to Schweickart, is to run the risk of "incoherence and intellectual dishonesty" (*Gender and Reading* 39). Yet, one can turn this statement around - to fixate on gender and politics, disrespecting the autonomy of the text, and imposing a feminist perspective on a seventeenth century writer, in fact, limits its meaning.

If all translation is interpretation, then why should anyone critique a translation that chooses to focus more on one aspect of a text than another? The answer lies in determining whether this feminist interpretation of Sor Juana's reply is a reader-friendly or a text-friendly translation. A text-friendly translation maintains the ambiguities and foreignness of the source text, while normally depending on many footnotes to explicate difficult passages. Arenal and Powell's translation boasts exhaustive annotations and thus it appears to fit a text-friendly categorization. However, the editors seem to have followed the translation theory of Borges, a process of anthropophagization or appropriation of the text, recasting it in their own feminist intonation. This kind of refocusing of the text is at once respectful of its foreignness because it brings to the foreground issues that help the reader understand the otherness of women, while at the same time it fixates excessively on one element of an extremely rich and varied text.

Such a text, according to Schweickart, can claim that its interpretation is valid only when a community of scholars, in her case, feminist scholars, validate that text. Yet, in an enthusiasm to "give voice" to women writers are feminists writers actually speaking for them? Toril Moi addresses this very paradoxical tendency of American feminists reproducing the very system they assert to be so oppressive:

Feminists obviously wish to make women speak; but from another viewpoint [this goal] carries some dubious political and aesthetic implications. For one thing it is not an unproblematic project to try to speak *for* the other woman, since this is precisely what the ventriloquism of patriarchy has always done: men have constantly spoken *for* women, or in the name of women. Is it right that woman now should take up precisely that masculine position in relation to other women? (67-8)

Arenal and Powell's enthusiasm to accentuate the feminist aspects of *La Respuesta* restricts the text's multiplicities, undoing that which they intended to maintain, the text's meaningful ambiguities. By making that which was previously ambiguous explicit, the text has been diminished aesthetically. Aesthetics and feminism have had a stormy relationship and Toril Moi has called for a reassessment of this relationship:

Surely, we should ask ourselves if it is not time to revise a feminist aesthetics that seems in these particular respects to lead to the same patriarchal and authoritarian dead end. In other words, it is time for us to confront the fact that the main problem in Anglo-American feminist criticism lies in the radical contradiction it presents between feminist politics and patriarchal aesthetics. (69)

This is the fundamental question - can feminism avoid its tendencies of overemphasizing politics and gender at the expense of ignoring aesthetics? Indubitably, Arenal and Powell have recast *La Respuesta* into a feminist form, thus enriching the scholarship on Sor Juana; however, the problem is the mold can be considered extremely myopic and restrictive. Now, the emphasis has changes from an aesthetic, non-gendered perspective to an excessively political and gender sensitive viewpoint.

However, Alan Trueblood's translation of *La Respuesta* is a shining example of the need for feminist perspectives of Sor Juana's work. On the surface, Trueblood's translation appears to be politically neutral; yet, his translation consistently attributes blame to Sor Juana as incapable of writing, while simultaneously ascribing deceitful characteristics to her person. His translation is not historically contextualized; in fact his few annotations exemplify a tendency to "find" errors. At least Arenal and Powell have contributed to the scholarship of Sor Juana's work with their exhaustive historical annotations and their emphasis of the feminist elements of Sor Juana's text. Trueblood, on the other hand, not only frequently misunderstands the text, execut-

ing a poor translation; he also imposes on the modern reader a male-centered perspective of Sor Juana's world that completely misses the feminist aspects of the source text. In fact, Trueblood's translation does not contribute to the understanding of Sor Juana's timeless text, but rather hinders its comprehension. He not only hinders its comprehension, by ignoring the feminist nuances in the text, he, also, boldly reinscribes meaning on the text by leaving out this important aspect of the text.

Although Arenal and Powell clearly ascribe new meaning to Sor Juana's text by overemphasizing the political and gender characteristics in her work, one must recognize the invaluable contribution they have made by contextualizing the socio-political environment in which Sor Juana produced her famous *Respuesta*. Neither the male nor the women-centered translation appear to be satisfactory, one reproduces an oppressive male perspective and the other produces a limited, fixated perspective on one aspect of a richly multiple text. Yet one must remember that feminist reader-response theory believes that one day politics and gender won't be issues on the forefront of feminist criticism. Meanwhile, Toril Moi petitions for a revision of Anglo-American feminism that downgrades the importance of aesthetics. Clearly, the time has come for a generation of scholars to weigh equally aesthetics and gender issues. Arenal and Powell may have overstressed the feminist aspects of Sor Juana's renowned *Respuesta*, but in doing so they have enriched our understanding of the text. Feminism and aesthetics need not be mutually exclusive and their fusion will only serve to ameliorate the scholarship of great writers like Sor Juana.

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