Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea de la Cruz

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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695)

Writer, composer, Baroque poet, philosopher and nun

The “Tenth Muse”
Outline of the Lecture

1) Colonial Encounters in New Spain: The Aztec Civilization and the Spanish Conquest

2) Racial mixing and hierarchy: the casta paintings

3) Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: A contribution to the “querelle des femmes” (the “woman question”)
The *Reconquista* and the Spanish Conquest of the New World

**SPAIN**

15-16th c *Limpieza de sangre*

1492 Fall of Granada

**NEW WORLD**

Columbus reaches the Bahamas islands and Hispaniola

1521 Fall of the Aztec empire

1533 Fall of the Inca empire

1550 Valladolid Debate
European explorations 15-16th century
Treaty of Tordesillas, 1494
The Columbian Exchange
America: an object of desire
Stradanus c.1588-89: “America rises to meet Americus”
The Aztec civilization
Tenochtitlan
# The Aztec Alphabet

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The Conquistadores

Hernan Cortés

Francisco Pizarro
The Conquistadores at work
Brutality of the Spaniards
Syncretism: Día de Muertos
Racial mixing and Casta painting
A letter from Sister Juana to Sister Filotea?

Sor Juana
“La respuesta” 1691: “My most illustrious senora, dear lady.” (1)

“how to express my appreciation..for having my scribblings printed, a gift so immeasurable as to surpass my most ambitious aspiration, my most fervent desire, which even as a person of reason never entered my thoughts.” (1)

Sor Filotea=The bishop of Puebla
Commissioned Sor Juana a critique of the sermon of a Jesuit priest;

Publishes without her consent: 1690 Athenagoric Letter;

Injunction to Sor Juana to devote herself to faith (vs. secular matters)
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

• A *criolla*: Spanish father and New Spain-born mother of Spanish ancestry;

• Illegitimate

• Raised on the hacienda of her grandfather; access to his library

• Lady-in-waiting at the court;

• 1667 enters the convent: a nun with a maid and a library
A biographical account

“I began to plague my mother with insistent and importunate pleas: she should dress me in boy’s clothing and send me to Mexico City to live with relatives, to study and be tutored at the University.”

“I entered the religious order, knowing that life there entailed certain conditions most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage…”
Theology as queen of sciences and secular matters

Galileo
Queen in what the subject-matter
Not in methodology
➤ Separation religion and science

Inés de la Cruz
“for how could one undertake the study of the Queen of sciences if first one had not come to know her servants?” (4)
“...study and more study, with no teachers but my books. Thus I learned how difficult it is to study those soulless letters, lacking a human voice or the explication of a teacher.”

“I undertook this great task without benefit of teacher, or fellow students with whom to confer and discuss, having for a master no other than a mute book, and for a colleague, an insentient inkwell.”
The “philosophies of the kitchen”

“But lady, as women, what wisdom may be ours if not the philosophies of the kitchen?..had Aristotle prepared victuals, he would have written more.”
The “querelle des femmes” (dispute of women” i.e. the woman question)

“What then is the evil in my being a woman?”

- Defense of the rights of women to be educated and to teach:

*Let women keep silence in the church*

..”in fact it is not permitted of women to read publicly in church, nor preach, why do they censure those who study privately?”
Questions

• How does her biographical account compare with the fictional character of Portia?
• Do you think that she can claim like Descartes did “I think therefore I am”?
• How would you compare her arguments to Shylock’s claim of a common humanity?