



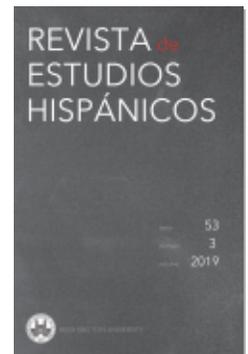
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*Ingenio y feminidad: Nuevos enfoques sobre la estética de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* ed. by Bárbara Ventarola  
(review)

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Ventarola, Bárbara, ed. *Ingenio y feminidad: Nuevos enfoques sobre la estética de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2017. 254 pp.

*Ingenio y feminidad: Nuevos enfoques sobre la estética de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* is a rigorous and coherent collection of essays on the New Spanish writer. Taking into account Sor Juana's mythification from Diego Calleja's hagiographic biography and beyond, the volume examines the nun's consciousness of her own genius before her twofold marginality as a woman writing from the Americas. Within this context, the unifying concept of *ingenio* refers to the intersection of poetic aptitude and self-conscious writing to which the collection seeks to attend. The anthology's overall relevance for Sor Juana studies is indisputable, for it challenges the sorjuanine canon with analyses of frequently overlooked pieces. Moreover, additional resonances with gender and women's studies and broader topics in early modern cultural production reflect recent efforts to draw the poet into scholarly discussions beyond the Hispanic world.

The volume opens with Ventarola's reflection upon Sor Juana's genius: a re-reading of the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, which illustrates the poet's self-conscious engagement with the concept. Ventarola details women's marginalization within constructions of genius from antiquity to the early modern period and argues that Sor Juana's epistle responds through textual hermaphroditism. Complementary to prior scholarship, the rich theoretical framework draws out the creative lyric self's fluid gender characteristics. Moreover, it highlights links between sensuality and rationality that intersect with broader discourses on the body and the senses. In the next study, Beatriz Colombi's remarks upon the transcultural productivity of *Neptuno alegórico* dovetail nicely with themes from Ventarola's essay. Specifically, she retraces the triumphal arch's mythological and emblematic roots and their sorjuanine transformations, lending a much-needed feminine and Creole perspective to prior readings of the topic by José Pascual Buxó and Octavio Paz.

The second section delves into the epistemological and ontological questions that a study of *ingenio* implies. In an exacting theoretical article, Callsen examines intersections of knowledge, subject and self-realization in Sor Juana's oeuvre. She draws out a *saber ser*, or subjective self-consciousness, in which the construction of the lyric self responds to and grapples with epistemological limits (100). The essay highlights a tension with the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* and is especially useful for understanding the autobiographic poetic subject. Next, Ingrid Simson reads *Primero sueño* in light of Sor Juana's intellectual isolation. While prior scholarship generally seeks to draw out resonances with scholarly and aesthetic traditions, Simson's purpose is to differentiate the piece from other works of "genius." Her reasoning sparks a provoking question: is *Primero sueño's* originality less a product of the nun's poetic virtuosity than it is the result of her isolation?

In the third segment, Verónica Grossi and Sebastian Neumeister examine Sor Juana's love poetry through a Petrarchan lens. Grossi's intertextual reading of the poetic portraits juxtaposes personal lyric—above all, that dedicated to the Countess of Paredes—with staged pieces like *Villancico VI* (1685 cycle) or *Neptuno alegórico*. In this way, she illustrates how the Petrarchan poetics of Sor Juana's

minor works also stand out in the theatrical space of pieces written for a public audience. For his part, Neumeister examines how Sor Juana intervenes in the poetic discourses of the Baroque by appropriating both the Petrarchan portrait and the emblematic tradition in “Pinta en jocoso numen, igual con el tan célebre Jacinto Polo, una belleza.” He notes that Sor Juana’s *ovillejo* elaborates a poetic portrait that is not based upon an extant, painted version and thus beckons a metatextual interpretation. Within this context, distortions of the Petrarchan *descriptio puellae* and its limits in “Pinta en jocoso numen” reflect the nun’s engagement with the poetic tradition in general.

Finally, the last section of *Ingenio y feminidad* considers Sor Juana’s writing for the stage. First, Simon Kroll delves into a topic that deserves additional exploration: the construction of the colonial Other in *loas* with American themes as well as in *Romance* 51. He maintains that the representation of this figure responds to dominant cultural codes and thus challenges interpretations of the Other as such. The argument allows for a re-reading of Sor Juana’s engagement with the indigenous figure from her own marginal position as a colonial woman. Subsequently, Susana Hernández Araico distances the poet’s theater from interpretations of sociopolitical hybridity and instead draws out formal and aesthetic innovations that constitute “una hibridez de creatividad artística experimental” (214). The essay includes an intriguing reading of how Sor Juana’s experimental tone responds to spatial differences between Madrid’s palace theater—performed at court or intimate, noble spaces—and the nun’s *comedias*, which could have been staged in university or religious settings as well as in the viceregal court. The anthology closes with Frederick Luciani’s reaction to the marginalization of Sor Juana’s stage pieces, which he argues is the result of their overlooked theatrical context. To this end, Luciani draws out political resonances that would have stood out in *Amor es más laberinto*’s court performance to commemorate the Count of Galve’s arrival. He concludes with a much-needed reflection upon how contemporary staging of Sor Juana’s theater might complement and extend written criticism. These astute closing observations leave the reader pondering new directions in Sor Juana studies.

For all of its strengths, *Ingenio y feminidad* has one notable limitation. The anthology positions itself as counterpoint to recent trends that privilege context over form, noting that its focus: “debe servir de estímulo para nuevas investigaciones que vayan más allá de la temática colonial, muy a la moda en estos días, sin por supuesto dejarla de lado” (14). Despite this and similar affirmations throughout the introduction, the collection’s retributory tone tends to stand out. Limiting statements temper appeals to draw from a variety of theoretical approaches, exemplified by this passage in the introduction:

en la actualidad aún se tiende a sobrevalorar la importancia del contexto para el autor. En oposición a tal tendencia muchos artículos de este volumen demuestran que los autores (y asimismo, pese a las mayores limitaciones que les impone la sociedad, las autoras) en muchos casos se relacionan con su contexto de manera bastante libre, y que eso acontece sobre todo si tienen la autoconciencia de ser ingeniosos. De ahí que sea

necesario redefinir el valor de la contextualización historia y revalorizar el rol estratégico y activo del autor sin descuidar del todo de su ubicación contextual. (22)

Here, Ventarola advocates for a scholarly perspective that considers the merits of multiple frameworks. Nevertheless, the statement also establishes a dichotomy between text and context that marginalizes the latter. Although interpretations that privilege philological readings are indeed valuable, diminishing sociohistorical approaches risks overlooking the rich interpretations that a nuanced blend of the two tendencies might provide. Advocating a return to aesthetic readings without considering the contributions of the so-called “colonial” turn risks negating the very gesture that *Ingenio y feminidad* seeks to counter (14).

In conclusion, *Ingenio y feminidad* unites established scholars in Sor Juana studies for a fruitful dialogue about *ingenio* in the poet’s work. Its essays intersect neatly with each other and engage key questions in the field, particularly with respect to visual culture and the stage. As such, the anthology is a welcome contribution to scholarship on the diverse aspects of Sor Juana’s oeuvre.

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**Ward, Thomas. *Decolonizing Indigeneity: New Approaches to Latin American Literature*. New York: Lexington Books, 2017. 260 pp.**

Thomas Ward’s *Decolonizing Indigeneity* makes a valuable contribution to Latin American Studies by advocating for the need to center indigenous and mestizo perspectives. Ward argues that indigenous and mestizo texts should be read on their own terms, and he seeks to do so by analyzing them in counterpoint to dominant colonial narratives.

In the introduction, Ward laments how students in the United States are left with the impression that the Spanish conquerors were more important than indigenous writers. He criticizes the Library of Congress’s cataloguing system as evidence of the provincialization of Latin America. The category “Spanish America” misconstrues Latin American literature as derivative of Spanish traditions. Works such as the *Popol wuj* and Nahua historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s *Historia* were studied in the nineteenth century from the perspective that indigenous cultures had disappeared. Moreover, indigenous historians such as Ixtlilxochitl were dismissed as overly biased in spite of the fact that they depicted their nations’ specificities more accurately. Ward highlights that a wide array of textual production existed in Latin America before the Spaniards, and continued to be developed after the conquest in a continual process of adaptation.

Chapter one, “Colonial Force: Word Choices, the Denial of Nationness, and the Coloniality of Mind,” terms three varieties of colonial force: outright colonialism (subjugation under an external power), intracolonialism (the persistence of colonial practices after nominal independence), and neocolonialism (the inequitable