

The field of convent literature in the early modern Hispanic world has grown with the publication of several landmark studies on nuns in the 1980s such as *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Words* and *Cultura femenina novohispana*. More and more annotated editions of nuns' manuscripts have been published and critical volumes on religious and secular women are no longer rare. This scholarship has illuminated the view of the complex cultural milieu of convent life. It offers important insight into convent writing, especially the genres of *vidas* (spiritual autobiographies) and hagiography. Yet, many of these studies focus only on one side of the Atlantic and examine nuns' lives only within the context of the thick walls of their convents. Furthermore, barring a few exceptions such as Carloyn Brewer's book, *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685* (2004), there is a lacuna of scholarship on the topic of gender in the Spanish Pacific. Fortunately, many of the insights learned from studies of women and religion in the Atlantic context can be applied to the Pacific part of the Spanish empire. Albeit small, there were seed groups of nuns that left their home convents in Spain (and elsewhere from places like Mexico and Peru) to establish new communities in distant lands and continents. These women show the important cultural impact of Catholic nuns in the expansion of the Iberian empire, an area of study that has not received the recognition it deserves.

In the Museum of the Prado hangs a portrait of one such nun. She is garbed in the traditional Franciscan habit of the Poor Clares. Although her veined hands and wrinkled face tell us that she has already lived many years, the artist portrays the nun with a penetrating gaze of determination. In her left hand she holds a book – most likely the Rule of Saint Clare – and in her right, she clutches a long crucifix. The painter of this captivating portrait is none other than Diego Velázquez. His subject is the Spanish nun from Toledo, Sor Jerónima de la Asunción (1555-1630). She sat for this portrait in 1620 while staying for almost two months in Seville on her way to the Philippines. She had just turned sixty-six years old at this time and Velázquez was only twenty-one. She would go on to found the first Convent of Poor Clares in Manila. He would become the most famous Golden Age painter in Spanish history.

Yet, there is more to this story. Last year while conducting archival research in Spain, I stumbled across a little known biography about Sor Jerónima written by a fellow nun and travel companion to Manila, Sor Ana de Cristo (1565-1634).

Due to this portrait, and the subsequent beatification process that still continues until this day, Sor Jerónima is familiar to art historians and scholars of Spanish nuns. In contrast to Sor Jerónima, there are virtually no studies on the unpublished manuscript written by Sor Ana de Cristo. Within the biography about the nun from Toledo, Sor Ana's narration offers the reader a fascinating taste of multiple places within the Iberian empire. Part of her work describes their fifteen-month journey to the Philippines, a saga that also included an overland trek across Mexico from Vera Cruz to Acapulco. According to her own account, Sor Ana was taught how to write by a Franciscan friar during the voyage and she took up the task of documenting the journey and writing a lengthy biography of Sor Jerónima (450 folios) once she arrived in Manila. A close analysis of Sor Ana's portrayal of Sor Jerónima tells us as much about the biographer as about her subject. Although in an assessment of her own writing, Sor Ana belittles herself as barely literate, a careful examination of her writing style reveals a literate woman adept in the rhetoric of obedience and humility.

Works like Sor Ana's are not always easily categorized into one genre such as biography or *vida*, and more frequently than not, they became a blending of the two or more styles of writing. Moreover these types of manuscripts prompt us to question authorship. We do not know

for sure if Sor Ana was the sole author of her work. On the contrary, it appears that other nuns in Manila collaborated in the last part of the document (there are sections narrated in the third person plural). Throughout this study, to reduce confusion, I have chosen to call Sor Ana's text a biography, but I am aware that this is a misnomer. Perhaps Sor Ana never put a title on her manuscript because she did not view it purely as a biography of Sor Jerónima, but more as a hybrid text: a combination of biography, autobiography, travel narrative and convent chronicle. Darcy Donahue's superb study on Discalced Carmelites speaks to the intricate interplay of authorship of *vidas* and other convent writing. She describes writing within the convent as a communal activity. In one case she examines a co-authored biography signed by five nuns. Her study sheds light on Sor Ana's manuscript and speaks to the collaborative nature of convent writing – a tradition that the nuns from Toledo brought with them to the Philippines.

The importance of Sor Ana's manuscript should not be underestimated. I believe she was well aware of the fact that her writing would never be published. She also knew, however, that her words would form the basis of future biographies. Like the collaborative nature of her text with other nuns from her convent, she also was collaborating with male ecclesiastical authorities, such as Ginés de Quesada and Bartholomé de Letona on their publications. Thus, Sor Ana's words carried weight and power. By hiding behind the veil of holy obedience not only was she able to explore her own concept of self, but she actively participated in the promotion of a saint. Sor Ana's work forms one of the main building blocks in Sor Jerónima's long road to canonization, a process that is still going on today.

The capstone to my project is the composition of a book-length work based on the writings of Sor Ana and those of other nuns in the Spanish Philippines. From a broad perspective my research provides a roadmap to the multi-faceted aspects of early modern nuns who ventured beyond the walls of their cloistered convents and travelled to the outermost fringes of the Spanish empire. Sor Ana, a fifty-five year old nun who had not left her community for a better part of thirty-eight years, offers the contemporary reader unique insight into the world of travel and adventure across several continents during the early 1600s. Her commentary on the native Filipino population and images of the eastern "other" add new and interesting perspectives on convent writing. Her story will appeal not only to the lay reader but to a wide array of scholars across disciplines. This project aims to bring to the fore a little known area of the world from the perspective of nuns living in the Spanish Pacific.

My book is in the early stages. I have presented two conference papers on Sor Ana's manuscript and I am in the process of finishing an article on the text. I have also completed a rough draft of the introduction which has helped shape the main themes of the book. With a grant from my university, I will spend two weeks this summer conducting archival research in Madrid and Toledo, Spain. I already have a partial transcription of the manuscript that I obtained from a previous visit to a Franciscan archive in Madrid. This transcription forms part of the beatification process of Sor Jerónima. I plan to visit the Convent of Santa Isabel in Toledo this summer and transcribe missing portions of the manuscript. This upcoming academic year (and before the start of the grant) I plan on translating select portions of the text for the book's appendix. For this reason I have not included any samples as part of the grant application.

During the year-long period of the NEH grant I have two main goals. First, I will make two research trips: one back to the archives in Spain and the other to archives in Mexico City. I still need to conduct investigation on the historical aspects of the document, filling in blanks about Sor Ana's background and the time that the women spent in Mexico City. Further, I want to use archival sources and rare books from the National Libraries in Mexico and Madrid to

conduct research on travel to the Philippines in the seventeenth century. I am not planning on traveling to Manila because it is my understanding that the Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental in Madrid holds much of the archival sources pertaining to the Philippines.

My second main goal is to complete a draft of the book. After the introduction, the book will be divided thematically into three main sections. The first includes chapters on the history of Spanish maritime travel to the Philippines, nuns' travel, and travel writing in the Iberian Atlantic and Pacific. The second section focuses on nuns' writing and literacy in the early modern period. One of chapters studies the genre of convent writing and examines the manuscript as a collaborative effort among the Spanish nuns based in Manila. Another explores the topic of miraculous literacy, and the third analyzes the biographical subject of Sor Jerónima as a window into Sor Ana's own exploration of herself as a writer. The last section is devoted to race and class in the early modern period. One chapter illuminates Sor Ana's portrayal of race during the journey (in particular her encounters with native populations in Mexico and the Philippines), and the final chapter analyzes Sor Ana's vision of class structure within the convent. Once established in Manila, for example, the Spanish nuns fought with Church authorities to allow native women to take the veil. Lastly, the book will include an appendix with bilingual Spanish to English translations of several key portions of Sor Ana's manuscript along with the few extant letters written by Sor Jerónima de la Asunción.

I believe that I have all of the intellectual tools necessary to complete this project. I was trained originally as a scholar of colonial Latin American literature, and I wrote my dissertation on the rhetorical strategies of colonial Mexican nuns. During that time I spent a semester in Mexico City conducting archival research at the Archivo General de la Nación and at the National Library. After graduating I returned to Mexican archives during 3 summers and subsequently published several articles on nuns of New Spain. In recent years, I have further developed my expertise on nuns on both sides of the Atlantic; in particular the subgenre of convent chronicles and travel writing. In 2009 I published an annotated edition and translation of *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*. The original manuscript, written by the abbess Madre María Rosa, documents a travel saga of a small group of nuns that journeyed from Madrid, Spain to Lima, Peru in the early 1700s. That project required a significant amount of archival research in Spain and a knowledge of paleography (study of handwriting) to transcribe the original manuscript. My expertise and hard work were rewarded when the book won the Josephine Roberts Prize for best Scholarly Edition in 2010. Although the area of the Philippines is somewhat new territory for me, the lives and writings of Spanish nuns share some common threads with their counterparts in Spain and Latin America. Furthermore, I am currently the lead editor in a forthcoming volume titled *Women of the Iberian Atlantic* (Louisiana State University Press, 2012), which has provided me valuable background knowledge on women and gender within the fluid boundaries of the Iberian empire. I have already visited the Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental in Madrid and I am familiar with their holdings. Also, I have been in contact with the nuns in Toledo and I will be consulting the original manuscript this summer.

The intended audience of this project will be students and scholars of Hispanic literature and the early modern history of monasticism. It will be of interest also to anyone who would like to learn more about religious women, gender, and colonization within the Spanish empire. My ultimate goal is to publish 'Early Modern Nuns in the Spanish Philippines' as a monograph with a scholarly press. The appendix will include bilingual versions (Spanish and English) of Sor Ana's manuscript, making accessible for the first time, her writing to readers of Spanish and English.

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