

The Program in Cultures, Civilizations and Ideas presents:



Persevering unto Martyrdom: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea*

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Thursday, March 19 12.40-14.00—Bilkent Library Orientation Room

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's repeated invocation of the figure of Phaëthon in her writing suggests a classical analog to her own catastrophic daring in the early modern world of colonial Mexico. Not unlike Phaëthon, whose reckless daring urges him to take over a god's role, to drive the sun's chariot, an undertaking which ultimately costs him his life, Sor Juana emerges as a woman writer and cloistered nun overstepping the confines appropriate to her gender and position in the larger ecclesiastical order. By continually inserting herself into a male-dominated literary tradition and taking up modes of discourse deemed morally treacherous, if not publically improper, Sor Juana demonstrates a competence and audacity that outrages Church superiors and initiates her demise. Looking specifically at *La Respuesta* (1691), I consider the strategies guiding Sor Juana's rhetorical spearing and the ultimate resignation and silence ushered in by that spearing. But that final surrender and surcease of communication, I suggest, may have been re-conceptualized by Sor Juana as a sort of freedom, so that in practicing the heroism of Phaëthon and mapping her own martyrdom onto that of Jesus, Sor Juana emerges as both agent and victim, hero and martyr, of her own collapse.