In her famous *Autodefensa espiritual* (Spiritual Self-Defense, circa 1681; known also as the *Carta de Monterrey*), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz argues against the censure of her confessor, the Jesuit priest Antonio Núñez de la Miranda, who strongly disapproved of female education and erudition. Reading Sor Juana’s accusations, it appears that Núñez claimed her dedication to a studious life jeopardized her path to salvation. Sor Juana challenges him to defend the dichotomy he draws between study and salvation, citing the famous examples of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and all the rest of the Church Fathers. She even invokes the example of Núñez himself – “cargado de letras” (19) [bowed down under the weight of so much learning, 435] as he was. She knows, however, that Núñez will not accept the comparison of men with women since, as she says, he believed men to be governed by “otra razón” (19) [other rules, 435]. She turns, then, to examples of erudite women of the past. Unlike in the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (Answer, 1691), where she will propose a lengthy list of scholarly women in support of her right to a studious life, here she lists just three: St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Gertrude, and St. Paula. It is St. Paula (307–404), the patron of her convent – “my Mother Saint Paula” – upon whom she focuses to challenge Núñez’s opinion about both the moral propriety of women’s study as well as their capacity to follow the example of these praiseworthy women:

¿No estudió Santa Catarina, Santa Gertrudis, mi Madre Santa Paula, sin estorbarle a su alta contemplación, ni a la fatiga de sus fundaciones, el saber hasta griego? ¿El aprender hebreo? ¿Enseñada de mi Padre San Jerónimo, el resolver y el entender las Santas Escrituras, como el mismo Santo lo dice? (19)

(Did not St. Catherine, St. Gertrude and my mother St. Paula study without harming their lofty contemplations, and was the latter’s travail in the founding of convents impeded by her knowledge even of Greek? By having learned Hebrew? By having been instructed by my Father St. Jerome to understand and interpret Holy Writ, as the Saint himself tell us?) (Scott 435)
While Sor Juana might have felt symbolic kinship with Paula through the name of the convent where she professed and the Hieronymite order to which she belonged, of which Paula was co-patron along with St. Jerome, radical differences drew them apart. Belonging to one of the few moments in Christian history when men of the Church encouraged women to attain knowledge, the saint of the early Church was permitted to freely enjoy the type of intellectual life that, for Sor Juana, seemed constantly under threat. As a member of St. Jerome’s inner circle, Paula lived a life of deeply-intertwined spiritual worship and intellectual ardor. She learned Hebrew and aided Jerome in his translation of the Vulgate Bible. She collaborated with him on his writings by acting as a learned interlocutor whose questions allowed Jerome to work through intellectual problems. She also founded monasteries for men and convents for women in Bethlehem, all the while living a life of the most extreme piety and asceticism.

In Sor Juana’s day, however, the ecclesiastical authorities took a different approach to female education, and women’s pursuit of knowledge found itself confined to an almost mythical past. Challenging this situation, Sor Juana turns to Paula and reconnects piety and female learning as practiced by her foremother. In the Respuesta, she stakes a claim for the cloister as a suitable space for the acquisition of knowledge within a Catholic framework: “pareciéndome menguada inhabilidad, siendo católica, no saber todo lo que en esta vida se puede alcanzar, por medios naturales, de los divinos misterios” (52) [Being a Catholic, I thought it an abject failing not to know everything that in this life can be achieved, through earthly methods, concerning the divine mysteries]. Here Sor Juana connects gender, education, and knowledge, situating the cloister as a privileged space for intellectual pursuits.

Since the 1980s, scholars in both Mexico and the US have attempted to follow Sor Juana’s lead and plot the connection among these three issues, reconstructing women’s access to education in the early modern Hispanic world both within and without the convent. In Mexico, Josefina Muriel pioneered this field in her landmark book of 1982, Cultura femenina novohispana (Female Culture of New Spain). Bringing together a group of primary sources culled from public archives and private libraries, Muriel presents an in-depth look at the literary and intellectual production of Spanish and Creole women (criollas) in New Spain. The book focuses primarily on the cultural works of criollas, with a lengthy section dedicated to an analysis of Sor Juana’s works. Muriel does address the issue of education, although only for a few pages of the lengthy volume. Establishing that educated women of the period were most often self-taught, she investigates female reading practices which she offers as female education, the details of which she extracts primarily from the all too prevalent manifestations of male censure and criticism of these same practices (21–22).

Five years later, the Mexico-based Spanish historian, Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, built on and expanded Muriel’s work, publishing the first in a series of books dedicated to education and family life in the colonial period. Gonzalbo’s 1987 book, Las mujeres en la Nueva España: Educación y vida cotidiana (Women in New Spain: Education and Daily Life) offers a comprehensive look at the education of various groups, including Creole and indigenous women. Gonzalbo details one of the only widespread opportunities for women’s education, that of the “escuelas de amigas” (teachers’ schools) inspired by similar spaces in Spain and made famous to the contemporary reader by Sor Juana’s discussion of how she learned to read at three at one such place (127–47). Gonzalbo describes how the schools offered a religious and domestic curriculum that varied greatly in quality since no official oversight regulated these spaces. In sum, Gonzalbo’s survey of female education was capacious, including a chapter on indigenous women. Apart from a brief introductory discussion of pre-conquest female education, Muriel made elite Spanish and Creole women the focus of her book.

In the United States, similar pioneering work to that of Muriel was carried out by Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau in Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in their Own Works (1989; revised
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The volume brings together a series of invaluable archival documents that offer examples of the different genres nuns from both Spain and the New World employed in their writing in the service of female agency. Alongside the texts, Arenal and Schlau offer a careful analysis of the women’s textual and rhetorical strategies of self-representation and in the process elucidate the varying contexts in which nuns were educated or succeeded in educating themselves. The authors highlight the wide variety in the level of instruction that nuns entering convents in Spain and the New World possessed. In contrast to Sor Juana, many Hispanic nuns had not received more than an elementary education upon entering the convent (147). Arenal and Schlau stress the barriers that all women faced – even those who arrived in the convent highly-educated – in expressing themselves through the written word. The authors identify the presence of “ignorant, timorous or fanatical clerics” (4) who warned women away from intellectual pursuits. In response, the nuns of Untold Sisters “pay lip service” in their writings to the incompatibility of female virtue and learning for women, demonstrating the unfavorable gendered power dynamic to which they were subject. Arenal and Schlau are keen to point out, however, that these same women used their writings to turn the tables on men and critique their pedantry and the vacuity of men’s writing and preaching (4). Sor Juana’s texts are not reproduced in this volume as her writings require no excavation, having not suffered centuries of neglect unlike those of her untold sisters. As Arenal and Schlau assert, however, more commonalities than one would think exist between Sor Juana and other writing nuns. In her Resposta, she “uses narrative attitudes common to most writing by nuns and to women’s autobiographical works: self-effacement and proclaimed humility, which disguise self-assertion, competitiveness, and ambition; veiled irony and commentary – at times self-criticism on the act of writing itself” (337). They also use the Resposta to plot the presence of other women, lost to posterity, citing Sor Juana’s reference to other intellectual nuns in Mexico City whose name were lost to posterity (338).

In Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Stephanie Merrim, on the other hand, places Sor Juana squarely at the center of her study, in order to examine connections between the Mexican nun’s writings and those of other early modern female authors from Europe and what is now the United States. Although the writers with whom Merrim compares Sor Juana are almost all secular and educated women, the desire to not view Sor Juana in isolation but instead see her as part of a community of women writers echoes the goal Arenal and Schlau establish. Departing from the shared standpoint of the querelle des femmes and the “pan Christian imaginary,” Merrim’s well-educated writers evince an “unceasing, unwitting, almost inevitable, textual sorority” despite the fact these women were, for the most part, unaware of each other's existence and worked in isolation (xxiii). A common struggle for the right to education also bound these women writers together. Merrim spends only a few pages on the specifics of female education but the issue is present throughout the book as the author demonstrates how women used their knowledge to access the power of the word. Merrim demonstrates how these writers give voice to what she terms the seventeenth-century “crisis” in women’s education, expressing “defiance and circumvention of patriarchal structures” (193). A key point in Merrim’s analysis is the decline in women’s educational and intellectual possibilities from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth century: “The scores of women humanists with a broader training of earlier years had shrunk in the seventeenth century to the exceptional Tenth Muses – sometimes to one icon, if any, per country” (199). This decline in educational possibilities, on the other hand, stimulated what Merrim terms “extremely significant developments in feminist activism” as privately or self-taught women rebelled against these exclusionary practices and made their thoughts known in published writings (201). Merrim is particularly interested in Sor Juana’s autodidacticism, identifying the crucial role it plays in her works, and situating the
Primero sueño (First Dream) as the most concrete manifestation of this “poetics of the autodidact” (229). The education Sor Juana gave herself through her book collection allowed her, as Merrim tells us, to both “piece together her own world of knowledge,” as well as profit from her exclusion from the University “with its restricted intellectual atmosphere committed to Scholastic philosophy” (Merrim, and León qtd in Merrim, 231). At the same time, Merrim shows how Sor Juana was also able to reproduce the methodology employed by erudite men and displayed, in all her works, “totalizing encyclopedic spectacles of knowledge” (231).

More recent scholarship has taken women’s education in the Hispanic world as its sole focus. Teresa Elizabeth Howe’s Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World, for instance, uses a variety of literary texts and primary sources to synthesize a picture of female education in the early modern Hispanic world. Howe seeks to create a genealogy of women authors and intellectuals who might have served as alternative exempla to other women seeking education when all that had been previously offered were male role models. Like Merrim, she begins with Christine de Pizan and the querelle des femmes, and moves on to Isabel la Católica, who perhaps was the first substantive example of a highly-educated Spanish woman. Teresa de Jesús provides a different example and offers Howe the opportunity to engage with the strategies Teresa employed to navigate questions of authority with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Howe demonstrates how the saint succeeds in promoting the role of women as educators of women while humbly acknowledging the superiority of the figure of the male letrado (68) (learned person). She dedicates her final chapter to Sor Juana and in this regard shows particular interest in Sor Juana’s challenging of the ironic contradiction in which men condemned women for their ignorance but refused them access to education. Howe demonstrates Sor Juana’s mobilizing of a series of exemplary male and female figures including St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Jerome in defense of her access to education and knowledge.

In their co-edited volume, Women’s Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World, Anne Cruz and Rosilie Hernández examine women’s literacy in an early modern Hispanic comparative context. In her introduction to the volume, Cruz examines the very different meanings knowledge, education, and writing held for men and women in the early modern Hispanic world. Reading and writing did, she argues, at least in principle, represent the “means through which both men and women acquired knowledge and entered into a literate world” (1). For men, however, the attainment of basic literacy signified the completion of a first step, permitting them to continue their studies and gain access to Latin and “the humanist legacy of the European Renaissance” (1). Women, on the other hand, almost always ended their studies at this point, having gained sufficient literacy for the “devotional and domestic purposes” that their lifestyle required (1). This basic literacy would not enable women to become erudite, nor acquire the scholarly knowledge of the day. Cruz defines the relationship between knowledge and literacy as “presupposing the possession over time of diverse kinds of knowledge, experiences, and skills proffered through written sources such as literary, devotional and philosophical treatises, and cultural and historical documents, many of which were written in Latin” (1). Writing of this kind served as a “vital rhetorical and social tool” and in the early modern Hispanic world women struggled and fought both to become authors and to attain this level of literacy (1–2). At the same time, because of restrictions on education, many women’s access to literacy focused exclusively on quotidian activities (2).

Three books produced in the last two decades examine the fruits of Sor Juana’s education in the form of her pursuit of knowledge through her works. Of particular interest to all three authors is how the question of knowledge might intersect with a particularly female subjectivity. For Stephanie Merrim, again in Early Modern Women’s Writing, the skills Sor Juana
acquired through her auto-didactic efforts enabled her to challenge her exclusion from the “City of Knowledge,” an all-male preserve that took the creation of the University as its defining moment (195). Sor Juana along with the other seventeenth-century women whom Merrim studies, demonstrates a desire to “storm the world of knowledge” and make a mark (194). Merrim terms this world the “City of Knowledge,” describing it as “seductive, institutionalized, male-controlled, and almost exclusively male” (194). Describing the Primero Sueño as “Sor Juana’s fable of the woman’s struggle for knowledge,” Merrim identifies textual practices in Sor Juana’s famous work that, drawing on the theorizing of the French feminist Luce Irigaray, she genders as feminine (238). Verónica Grossi also identifies the production of female knowledge in Sor Juana’s work in her 2007 book, Sigilosos vuelos epistemológicos en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Secret Epistemological Flights in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz). Through a close reading of three of Sor Juana’s key texts: Neptuno Alegórico (Allegorical Neptune), the loa and auto sacramental of El Divino Narciso and Primero Sueño, Grossi uses an analysis of allegory in the nun’s work in order to situate it within the rhetorical, philosophical and ideological context of the day (151). Grossi positions Sor Juana’s use of allegory as facilitating the insinuation of a feminine discourse within the parameters of her participation in established discourses: “En El Neptuno, el poder imperial, asociado retóricamente con el poder divino, se contrapone al entendimiento femenino … Las figuras mitológicas de Isis y Minerva, se sobreponen en importancia al propio Dios de las Aguas, que representa al nuevo virrey” (148) [In the Neptuno, imperial power, associated rhetorically with divine power, comes up against female understanding … The mythological figures of Isis and Minerva take on more importance than the God of the Seas himself, who represents the Viceroy].

Colonial epistemologies and their relationship to a feminine subject lie at the heart of Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel’s 1999 analysis of Sor Juana’s work, Saberes americanos: subalternidad y epistemología en los escritos de Sor Juana (American Knowledges: Subalternity and Epistemology in the Writings of Sor Juana). Martínez-San Miguel focuses on those texts which most clearly reveal what she terms a “transgresiva preocupación epistemológica” [a transgressive epistemological concern] in Sor Juana’s work. The nun demonstrates a multi-faceted subjective self in which she draws on her feminine, colonial, and Creole condition. These subjectivities come together in order to undermine the “hegemonía de una solo paradigma del saber” [hegemony of a single paradigm of knowledge] and, in turn, the idea that knowledge can exist as a “categoría inmutable y absoluta” (48) [immutable, absolute category].

The most recent scholarship examining Sor Juana’s life and work from the standpoint of knowledge appears to have taken a theological turn, proving that an exploration of this most masculine of epistemologies provide a fertile area of investigation for scholars for theologians and literary scholars alike. In her 2011 article “Sor Juana’s Critique of Theological Arrogance,” Lisa D. Powell analyzes Sor Juana’s theological engagements from the standpoint of the nun’s call for “epistemic humility” from male theologians (15). Analyzing the way Sor Juana frames theological debate in the Carta atenagórica (Letter Worthy of Athena) and the Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz, Powell demonstrates how beyond “the modesty clauses and claims of ignorance,” Sor Juana challenges the “expectations of women’s writing by exposing the overwhelming arrogance of the theological academy of her day, as it stands in contrast to her intelligent, learned arguments hedged in such a way that leaves them open to dialogue” (15–16). Indicating a new reason for the writing of the Carta atenagórica, Powell shows how Sor Juana’s intention was not to critique Vieira’s theological position but rather “demonstrate that Vieira’s declarations about the superiority of his thought, interpretation, and position on the topic were inappropriate, unwarranted, and even deserving divine punishment” (17). Powell reads “passion and frustration” in Sor Juana’s words, as she demonstrates her displeasure that one
such as Vieira – a renowned preacher and theologian – would make such bold claims about his knowledge into the divine mysteries and his ability to articulate them” (23).

Stephanie Kirk offers a close reading of a 1727 Portuguese text *Apologia a favor do Reverendo P. Antonio Vieyra da Companhia de Jesus da Provincia de Portugal* (Apology to Support the Reverend Father Antonio Vieyra of the Company of Jesus of the Province of Portugal). The lengthy theological tract ostensibly written by a nun, Sor Margarida Ignácia, but in fact authored by her brother, a cleric, Luis Gonçalves Pinheiro, offers a defense of Vieira’s theological position as challenged by Sor Juana in the *Carta atenagórica*. Kirk demonstrates the longevity and geographic extension of the dispute as well as shedding further light on the intricacies of the theological and gender questions surrounding Sor Juana’s engagement with Vieira in her *Carta atenagórica*. In “San Jerónimo en el eje de la polémica en torno de la *Carta atenagórica* de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” (St. Jerome in the Center of the Polemic Surrounding the Letter Worthy of Athena by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz), Fernando Riva also examines Sor Juana’s engagement with patristic theology, as she grappled with St. Jerome’s texts in the last years of her life. Although a woman, her status as a Hieronymite nun would have allowed her to have access to these texts and use them as models in her own writing. Riva sees the circle of female disciples surrounding Jerome, particularly St. Paula, as obviously holding a great attraction for Sor Juana. In New Spain, patristic theology was accessed through the neo-scholastic intellectual framework that infused the work of the Jesuits, and that, according to Charles Patterson, wielded influence over Sor Juana and other members of the intellectual elite. Drawing on the work of a number of scholars, including Octavio Paz, in his article “Jesuit Neo-Scholasticism and Criollo Consciousness in Sor Juana’s *El mártir del sacramento, San Hermenegildo*,” Patterson highlights the criollo element of this intellectual movement, showing how this proto-patriotic gesture intersected with the Jesuit belief of Christian Universalism (423). Through an analysis of the two *autos* and their attendant *loas*, Patterson demonstrates how Sor Juana’s work drew heavily on this Jesuit framework. At the center of this erudite network of scholars was the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, whose work wielded significant influence over Sor Juana. The Mexican nun was attracted to Kircher’s polymathic sensibilities and attempts to attain total knowledge. Sor Juana also drew inspiration from his theological interests, particularly in regards to the material she chose for each of her three *autos*, as Patterson explains: “Each [auto] finds Eucharistic typology in a different context: in *El cetro*, she demonstrates the exegetical process of finding Christian types in the Old Testament (i.e., Jewish tradition). In *El divino Narciso*, she shows that the same process can be applied to the Greco-Roman myth of Echo and Narcissus. In *El mártir del sacramento* (The Martyr of the Sacrament), she applies the same methodology to decisive historical events in Spain’s history” (425).

Many nuns produced writing from the convent in genres that did not fit within the officially-recognized paradigms Sor Juana so ably reproduced. In their article “Leyendo yo y escribiendo ella: The Convent as Intellectual Community” (2006), Arenal and Schlau tackle the question of knowledge produced by women outside the male intellectual sphere. They highlight how the realms of affect, dream, intuition, and inspiration, “to which women were largely confined anyway,” became “vehicles for knowing” (130). The authors also stress that women’s practices of knowledge production differed from those of men, being often collaborative and not produced with publication and wide dissemination in mind (130). Arenal and Schlau offer an alternative way of thinking about intellectual activity, one that encompasses more “integrated” and interior ways of knowing (141–42). The exclusionary practices of male education did not stop women from enjoying a rich intellectual life of a different sort: “kept from the *aula* of universities and colegios, some women were avid students in the *castillo interior*” (141). Beginning in the United States with Arenal and Schlau’s *Untold Sisters*, over the last couple of decades scholars have edited,
analyzed, and translated the writings of nuns whose voices introduce us to the complexities of convent culture. Many of the writings to which we have access detail the visionary and mystical experiences of nuns. In almost all of these cases, these texts exist because male confessors ordered women to write them, and as “escritoras por obediencia” (writers due to obedience), nuns were not always able to claim authority or ownership over their own works. At the same time, women found strategies to assert their subjectivity through their writings and the work of scholars such as Arenal and Schlau has been invaluable in helping us to decode and identify these techniques. The writings of Madre María de San José, a nun from Puebla, offer a compelling example of this type of recounting of this type of female authorial agency. Anthologized in Untold Sisters and in two volumes edited by Kathleen Myers (1993; 1999), María de San José’s diaries present invaluable access to the spiritual journey beginning in childhood of a devout but independent woman who overcame internalized anxiety regarding authorship and ecclesiastical censure to display self-confidence as a writer (Arenal and Schlau, Untold Sisters 369). From Sor María’s texts we gain invaluable insight into the experiences of a visionary nun while learning much about the life of a woman in rural colonial society (she did not profess as a nun until she was 32). Further examples of nuns’ spiritual autobiographies are analyzed in Kristine Ibsen’s Women’s Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America (1999). Particularly compelling in this study is Ibsen’s discussion of the writings of the Mexican nun Sebastiana de la Santísima Trinidad, whose written accounts of her extreme penitential regime allow us to access to women’s understanding of the role of the body in the representation of agency through what was understood by her as “heroic virtue” (157). In her study of Colombian mystic nun and spiritual writer, Madre Castillo, Kathryn McKnight also examines the discourse of power that the nun develops through the representation of a humble and often abject self. In her The Mystic of Tunja: The Writings of Madre Castillo 1671–1742 McKnight places Madre Castillo within both the female mystical tradition and the specificities of her colonial condition in order to unravel the complexities of a writing subject whose self-representation evinced both sacred humility and, conversely, affirmations of agency. The analysis carried out by the aforementioned critics in their studies of visionary, mystical and ascetic nuns locate power and resistance at the heart of these women’s writings. Jean Franco, it is important to mention, takes a very different approach in her examination of the writings of mystical and visionary discourse. Discarding the possibility that an alternative female production of valuable knowledge could be located within the recounting of these experiences, Franco sees these mystic and visionary women as writers who felt no pleasure in the act, “forced as they were to write a pale form of recollection carried out as an unpleasant task in the hangover deadness that followed the rapture” (3).

Nuns also wrote a wide variety of texts as they administered their convent duties. These responsibilities gave women a measure of independence and agency they most probably would not have enjoyed outside the convent walls. Nuns penned many letters regarding convent business, but also addressed issues which demonstrated how deeply attached they were to the character of the communities into which they had professed, and how reluctant they were to allow the ecclesiastical authorities to modify or reform their way of life. In Indigenous Writings from the Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico, Mónica Díaz takes a close look at why and how nuns wrote letters from the convent. Identifying conventual letters as a subgenre within a larger epistolary category, she highlights the mix of classical rhetoric and what she terms “spiritual rhetoric” in nuns’ letters. Díaz looks closely at the letters that the indigenous nuns of the Convent of Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Cosamaloapan sent to the commissary general of the Franciscan order in New Spain. This was the second convent founded for indigenous women and as in the first foundation, that of Corpus Christi, criolla nuns were given positions of authority in what was supposed to be a convent for noble Indian
women. This deviation from the intent of the convent founders culminated in the production of ethnic strife within the cloister. In their letters, the indigenous nuns infuse their discourse with the “stereotypes imposed upon them by the Spanish colonial system, thereby participating in the construction of ethnic identity in play during the years of the colonial presence in New Spain” (153). Díaz terms this strategy the “rhetoric of Indianness” and demonstrates how women used this textual space to gain autonomy in their living space (136). In her *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities* (2007), Stephanie Kirk brings another case study of convent letter writing to the fore, presenting a series of letters that tell of opposition to the eighteenth-century *vida común* (collective living) reforms. In the convent of the Santísima Trinidad in Puebla, nuns claimed authority through textual resistance in the form of the carefully-crafted letters they wrote to the Viceroy, detailing their suffering at the hands of a hostile bishop (104). In their writing, the nuns mobilized a strategic vacillation between abnegation and authority as they sought to persuade the Viceroy to put a stop to the *vida común* reforms and allow them to return to the life under which they professed (115).

As the above analysis has shown, over the last few decades scholars have produced stimulating and wide-ranging studies addressing the education of women in New Spain and the convent as locus for the production of knowledge(s) and writing. The rich complexity of Sor Juana’s work continues to challenge scholars to understand how knowledge and gender intersect and how these two concepts play out when women gain access to the written word. Recent archival discoveries – the *Carta de Serafina de Cristo*, the *Carta de Puebla*, the sermons of Palavicino and Muñoz de Castro on the *Carta atenagórica* and its detractors – have provided challenges to existing scholarship as well as creating conflicts between scholars, particularly in Mexico, that stand to rival those surrounding Sor Juana in her own day. Scholars with expertise in gender studies might want to examine more closely the ideological arguments that dismiss decades of valuable feminist scholarship and summarily deem them offensive, in particular those of Alejandro Soriano, who finds this area of inquiry antithetical to Sor Juana’s religious status. Studies that engage in a deeper cultural contextualization of Sor Juana’s intellectual milieu would also be welcome, in order to further understand to what extent her own epistemological practices coincided with those of the men alongside whom she wrote. Such inquiries would pick up where the valuable work of Octavio Paz left off and, at the same time, stand as a corrective to his harsh critique of some of the intellectual currents of the day. Studies examining neo-scholastic thought, and the Christian humanism of the Jesuit tradition as reflected in Sor Juana’s work would help us know more about the intricacies of New Spanish baroque erudition and its contribution to early modern networks of knowledge in the Americas and beyond.

### Notes

1 “¿Las letras estorban, sino que antes ayudan a la salvación? ¿No se salvó San Agustín, San Ambrosio y todos los demás Santos Doctores? Y Vuestra Reverencia, cargado de tantas letras, ¿no piensa salvarse?” (19) [Does learning now prevent, when in other times it furthered salvation? Were not St. Augustine, St. Ambrosius and all the other Doctors of the Church saved? And Your Reverence, bowed down under the weight of so much learning, do you not plan to be saved?] (Scott 435).

2 All translations from the *Autodefensa* are Nina M. Scott’s.

3 Teresa Howe also addresses the “special attention” Sor Juana pays to Paula in her discussion of female educational opportunities (169).

4 Both Octavio Paz and Paula Findlen have also studied Kircher’s influence on Sor Juana’s work.

5 *Vida común* refers to a series of reforms instigated by Spanish bishops in eighteenth-century New Spain in which church authorities attempted to force nuns to radically change their lifestyles and live a more communal and austere life.