

**DISCOVERING THE PERFORMANCES OF HYBRIDITY AND POST-COLONIALISM IN THE ANSWER OF DE LA CRUZ’S THROUGH A BHABHIAN DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE CRISIS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY**

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
<p>This study investigates the performance of identity and culture in postcolonial literature, emphasizing how these authors engage in a strong critique and opposition to the colonial past. Drawing on Said's Orientalist theories as well as Bhabha's (1994) ideas of mimesis and hybridity, this dissertation seeks to identify one way in which postcolonial literature reflects the complexity of identity creation within colonially dominated countries. According to the article, postcolonial literature does more than just criticize the cultural and psychological repercussions of colonialism; it also reconfigures identity and builds elements of resistance. Indeed, postcolonial literature offers fresh insights into the lingering effects of colonial legacies on contemporary society by redefining global conceptions of identity, culture, and power in a postcolonial world. It is clear from an analytical perspective.</p>	<p>Post-colonialism, Hybridity, Sor Juana Inés, Homi K. Bhabha’s, Respuesta, The Answer</p>

**Introduction**

*The Answer "Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz"* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, we encounter a deeply complex interplay of cultural identity, resistance, and ambivalence, especially when analyzed through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha’s post-colonial theory. Sor Juana's work is not just a defense of her intellectual capabilities and her right to pursue knowledge; it’s a profound reflection of the tensions she navigated as a creole woman intellectual in colonial Mexican society during the late 17th century. Her engagement with power, identity, and the pursuit of knowledge speaks to the larger post-colonial struggles Bhabha outlines, particularly in his concept of hybridity, where identities and cultural expressions are formed in the intersections of colonial rule and the identities of the colonized. Bhabha's idea of hybridity stems from his understanding of the inherent ambivalence within colonial discourse. He argues that colonial subjects are never fully subjugated because there’s always a space of negotiation a "third space" where cultures overlap and meaning is constructed. This space is where hybridity arises, challenging the binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized. This state of "in-betweenness" is critical to understanding how identities shift and change through ongoing "negotiation of cultural identity," a process that disrupts the idea of fixed identities (Bhabha, 44). In Sor Juana's

case, she exists in this liminal space, where her roles as a creole, a woman, and a scholar don't fit neatly into any category approved by the colonial establishment. By asserting her right to pursue knowledge, she disrupts both the role expected of women in the Church and challenges the power of the colonial patriarchy.

Sor Juana's hybridity becomes apparent both in her subject matter and the way she writes. She adopts and modifies the European literary tradition, using it in ways that both mimic and critique colonial culture. Bhabha would describe her position as one that occupies a "third space of enunciation," where "the colonial identity is transformed through the disavowal of the colonizer's assumed superiority" (Bhabha, 55). For example, her use of classical rhetoric and her mastery of European scholarly traditions can be seen as a form of mimicry. However, this isn't merely imitation; it's a sophisticated critique of colonial discourse. By demonstrating that she, a creole woman, can excel in these intellectual traditions, she exposes the contradictions within colonial systems, showing that the colonized can not only participate in but also surpass the intellectual frameworks set by the colonizer. The crisis of cultural identity Sor Juana faces in *The Answer* becomes clear as she negotiates her role as an intellectual within the constraints of colonial and ecclesiastical authority. Bhabha describes how the post-colonial subject engages in a form of "colonial mimicry," where they imitate the colonizer's values and culture, but in a way that creates a "difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 86). This mimicry, however, is not without complications. While it allows the colonial subject to perform colonial norms, it also undermines them. Sor

Juana's command of philosophical and theological discourse acts as mimicry, but her insistence on intellectual autonomy and her subtle critiques of the Church reveal the cracks in the colonial system and emphasize the ambivalence of her place within it. By mastering the language and intellectual traditions of her oppressors, she exposes the limits of their control, embodying what Bhabha refers to as "the ironic compromise of colonial authority" (Bhabha, 122).

Sor Juana's hybridity is not limited to her intellectual pursuits; it is also deeply rooted in her cultural identity. As a creole, she represents a mixture of indigenous, African, and European influences, which is a hallmark of the colonial experience in New Spain. Her work reflects this complex blending of identities and cultures. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, as a space where negotiation and transformation occur, is key to understanding Sor Juana's position. Her identity as a creole allows her to engage with European intellectual traditions while also being firmly grounded in the specific cultural and political realities of colonial Mexico. This reflects what Bhabha calls "the ambivalence of colonial discourse," where the colonial subject is torn between wanting recognition within the terms of the colonizer's framework and rejecting the authority of that same framework (Bhabha, 132). Sor Juana's interactions with the Church, particularly her correspondence with the Bishop of Puebla, embody this ambivalence. She seeks validation within the intellectual and spiritual hierarchies of the Church but resists the limitations these hierarchies place on her as a woman.

This hybrid nature of Sor Juana's cultural identity also raises critical questions about the power dynamics embedded in knowledge and its dissemination. Her decision to write *The Answer* as a direct response to male authority is a bold act of resistance. Through her writing, Sor Juana performs what Bhabha describes as "the disjunctive temporality of the modern nation," where

"the nation's narrative is always disrupted by the voices that emerge from its margins" (Bhabha, 148). By asserting herself in the realm of intellectual debate, traditionally reserved for men, she challenges both colonial and patriarchal narratives that aim to silence her. Her ability to engage with complex

theological and philosophical issues defies the colonial belief that women, especially creole women, are intellectually inferior. This disruption of established roles and identities fits into the broader post-colonial critique of fixed, binary power relations.

So, through the lens of Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the crisis of cultural identity, Sor Juana's *The Answer* becomes far more than a simple defense of her intellectual capabilities. It serves as a sophisticated engagement with the power structures of colonialism, gender, and cultural identity.

Sor Juana's unique position as a hybrid subject—being a creole woman intellectual in colonial Mexico—exemplifies the fluid and performative nature of post-colonial identity, as Bhabha theorizes. Her ability to resist and navigate these oppressive structures not only asserts her intellectual agency but also highlights the broader post-colonial condition, in which identities are continuously negotiated within the harsh frameworks of colonial power. Sor

Juana, through both mimicry and resistance, becomes a figure of hybridity, embodying Bhabha's "third space" where colonial authority is simultaneously mirrored and subverted.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

The complex interplay between hybridity, post-colonialism, and cultural identity is deeply embedded in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's "Respuesta a Sor Filotea," a text that reflects her unique experience as a woman and intellectual in colonial New Spain. At the core of the problem lies the question of how Sor Juana navigates these intersecting forces: colonialism, gender oppression, and her intellectual pursuit. Using Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a lens, this analysis seeks to uncover how Sor Juana's writing both expresses and resists the pressures of cultural identity in a colonial world.

Bhabha's notion of hybridity, particularly his idea of the "Third Space," is crucial here. This concept refers to a space of negotiation where individuals, caught between two cultures, create new meanings and identities. In Sor Juana's case, she occupies a unique position: a criolla woman, born in the colonies, neither fully belonging to the Spanish colonizers nor to the indigenous peoples. Her intellectual and spiritual identity, shaped by both colonial power structures and her personal pursuit of knowledge, embodies this tension. The "Respuesta" is a striking example of how she asserts her voice within these limitations, a response to the critique from the Bishop of Puebla (disguised as Sor Filotea), defending her right to intellectual expression as a woman. Her writing becomes a space where she navigates the pressures of conforming to societal and religious expectations while simultaneously asserting her autonomy and intellectual sovereignty.

This tension points to a larger crisis of cultural identity in the colonial world, where subjects like Sor Juana were forced to reconcile the demands of their imposed identities with their personal sense of self. Her struggle between her religious duties and her intellectual ambitions reflects this internal conflict, a conflict shaped by the colonial context in which European values and religious dogma were imposed on the people of New Spain. Yet, Sor Juana's text is not simply a passive reflection of these pressures; it is an active, strategic response to them. Through her eloquent defense of her intellectual pursuits, she challenges the patriarchal and colonial powers that sought to silence her, using her writing as a tool of resistance.

In this light, Sor Juana's "Respuesta" becomes more than just a defense of her own actions—it becomes a text that exemplifies the ongoing negotiation of identity that characterizes the colonial condition. Using Bhabha's framework, we can see how her writing performs this negotiation, creating a hybrid space where she both resists and redefines the terms of her existence within colonial power structures.

Sor Juana's work, then, stands as a profound example of the complexities of cultural identity in a post-colonial context, offering insight into how intellectual resistance can emerge from within even the most oppressive systems.

## 1.3 Literature Review

### 1.3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study centers around post-colonial theory. Specifically, it focuses on Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, mimicry, and the crisis of cultural identity. These concepts are key to analyzing how Sor Juana's *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (The Answer) engages with, and subtly resists, the colonial power structures of her time. Sor Juana navigates the rigid boundaries of race, gender, and intellectual authority imposed by colonial society, and this approach helps illuminate how her work reflects a deeper instability in the identities shaped by colonial rule.

Bhabha's idea of hybridity challenges the rigid binaries of colonial thought, like the strict divide between colonizer and colonized. He sees colonial encounters as creating hybrid identities that don't fit neatly into one category or the other. These identities, instead, live in a "third space," where cultures overlap and influence each other. Sor Juana embodies this hybrid identity—she's a criolla woman, working within a deeply patriarchal, Eurocentric society, but using that same society's scholarly tools to create her intellectual space. This is how Sor Juana performs hybridity in her work. She combines European academic traditions with her own unique perspectives, which challenge the dominant narratives of her time. As Bhabha argues, hybridity

"displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority" (Bhabha 37). Sor Juana's *The Answer* shows exactly this displacement—by mixing European intellectual traditions with her own, she resists the strict divisions between colonizer and colonized, male and female.

Additionally, Bhabha's concept of mimicry is another useful way to think about Sor Juana's rhetorical strategy in *The Answer*. Bhabha defines mimicry as an imitation of the colonizer's culture that is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Sor Juana demonstrates this by mastering European theological and philosophical discourse, but in a way that subtly questions and undermines the authority of the structures she's working within. She uses the very intellectual tools of the patriarchal and colonial systems that sought to limit her to expose their flaws. Bhabha describes mimicry as "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 123), and Sor Juana's mimicry works in just that way—her use of European intellectual traditions both legitimizes her as a scholar and simultaneously challenges the constraints of those traditions, especially for women in her society.

Bhabha's idea of a crisis of cultural identity is also particularly relevant to Sor Juana's work. In colonial contexts, the tension between the colonizer's norms and the colonized subject's residual identity leads to a profound crisis of identity. Sor Juana, as a criolla intellectual in a

Europeandominated society, faces this tension directly. She's constantly negotiating between her status as an intellectual who draws on European traditions and her identity as a woman in colonial Mexico, where those traditions often exclude or marginalize her. This situation creates a sense of fragmentation and displacement, similar to what Bhabha describes. However, Bhabha also sees these crises of identity as opportunities for new cultural forms to emerge—forms that don't fit neatly into existing categories but instead occupy the "third space" of hybridity (Bhabha 54). Sor Juana's work, then, can be seen as a product of this very process. Her intellectual identity transcends the boundaries imposed on her, allowing her to navigate and resist multiple layers of exclusion.

Sor Juana's strategic use of language and rhetoric in *The Answer* also ties closely to Bhabha's notion of performativity in colonial discourse. Her text doesn't just reflect her intellectual position—it actively performs it. She uses irony, self-deprecation, and complex scholarly arguments to carve out a space for herself within, but also against, the patriarchal and colonial structures she's critiquing. This performative aspect of her work aligns with Bhabha's idea of the "performative space of enunciation" (Bhabha 56), where new identities and meanings are constantly being negotiated in response to power dynamics. Through this performance, Sor Juana asserts an intellectual identity that cannot be confined by traditional gender or colonial boundaries.

This crisis of identity and performative resistance is perhaps most clear in Sor Juana's defense of her right to pursue knowledge. Throughout *The Answer*, she constructs her argument by referencing European authorities, such as Aristotle and Saint Jerome, while simultaneously asserting her intellectual autonomy as a woman. This dual approach reflects the hybrid nature of her intellectual stance—she uses European traditions to assert her authority but does so in a way that makes room for her own unique experiences and challenges the systems that exclude her. As Bhabha points out, hybridity creates a "split-space of enunciation" where "the subject of cultural difference becomes an object of desire" (Bhabha 162). Sor Juana's intellectual performance reflects this dynamic—she's both a subject of admiration for her scholarly achievements and a source of unease for those who see her breaking the boundaries of what a woman, or a colonial subject, should be.

Thus, by applying Bhabha's post-colonial theory to *The Answer*, we can see how Sor Juana performs hybridity and negotiates the complexities of her cultural and intellectual identity.

Through mimicry, she adopts the scholarly traditions of her colonial society, but in a way that subverts the very structures that sought to control her. Her work reflects the crisis of identity produced by the colonial condition but also uses that crisis as an opportunity for resistance and redefinition. Sor Juana's intellectual performance—her use of mimicry, hybridity, and performative language—reveals the deep ambivalence and instability of colonial and patriarchal power, positioning her work as a powerful critique of both.

### 1.3.2 Previous Studies

The performances of hybridity and post-colonialism in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *The Answer* have been extensively discussed within the critical frameworks of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, particularly in relation to the crisis of cultural identity. Sor Juana's text, written in response to the Bishop of Puebla under the pseudonym Sor Filotea, represents not only a defense of her intellectual capabilities as a woman but also a deeper interrogation of cultural identity in the context of colonial Mexico. To uncover these layers, it is essential to engage with Bhabha's notion of hybridity, which emphasizes the interaction of colonizer and colonized cultures, and the subsequent formation of a 'third space' where new identities emerge. Bhabha argues that "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (Bhabha 211). Sor Juana, in this context, navigates the intersection of indigenous, Spanish, and religious influences, complicating her cultural identity and intellectual autonomy through acts of resistance and subversion.

*The Answer* serves as a profound example of how a colonial subject, particularly a woman, negotiates the power dynamics of colonial discourse. Bhabha's theory of mimicry, wherein the colonized mimics the colonizer in a way that is both imitation and mockery, becomes a critical lens for examining Sor



Juana's rhetorical strategies. Bhabha claims that mimicry is a "metonym of presence" that produces a space of ambivalence and disruption (Bhabha 86). Sor Juana's appropriation of theological and philosophical discourses reflects this ambivalence. On the one hand, she demonstrates mastery over these forms, thereby gaining authority; on the other, her very use of these forms within the context of her gender and colonial status destabilizes the assumption of the exclusivity of such intellectual practices to European men.

Moreover, Sor Juana's deployment of irony and subversion in her arguments reflects what Bhabha describes as "the process of ambivalence" that disrupts the colonizer's authority (Bhabha 91). Her critique of gender norms and ecclesiastical authority, although couched in the submissive and humble language expected of her as a woman and a nun, nonetheless calls into question the structures that marginalize her. This ambivalence creates a space where Sor Juana can assert her agency within the very framework designed to suppress it. In *The Answer*, she writes: "I have desired to study and, knowing that it is so disallowed for my sex, I have fought my impulses and managed to block them to some extent" (Juana Inés de la Cruz 44). Here, Sor Juana engages in a complex negotiation of gendered identity, situating herself as both compliant with and critical of the patriarchal structure. The performance of humility, in this case, becomes a strategic tool through which she claims a space for intellectual resistance.

Hybridity also plays a crucial role in Sor Juana's text when considering her cultural positioning as a criolla in New Spain. The concept of the "in-between" or liminal space, central to Bhabha's theory of hybridity, is key to understanding Sor Juana's articulation of identity. She exists between the indigenous and European worlds, navigating the conflicting cultural expectations imposed by Spanish colonialism. Her intellectual pursuits, influenced by European thought, simultaneously reflect the syncretic nature of colonial life, where indigenous and European elements coexisted in tension. Bhabha states that hybridity reveals "the productivity of colonial power, its shifting and ambivalent mimetic strategies, its ability to appropriate and rearticulate" (Bhabha 160). Sor Juana's mastery of European intellectual traditions can be read not merely as assimilation but as a rearticulation of these traditions within the context of colonial New Spain, thus creating a hybrid intellectual identity that challenges the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized.

Additionally, the crisis of cultural identity that Sor Juana experiences is not only shaped by her position as a criolla but also by her gender. Her gender complicates her position within the colonial power structure, as the intellectual pursuits that define her identity are at odds with the prescribed roles for women in colonial society. As a nun, her access to education is both a privilege and a limitation. She is permitted intellectual exploration within the convent's walls, yet her works are subject to the scrutiny of male ecclesiastical authorities, as evidenced by the

Bishop's critique. This mirrors Bhabha's description of the "unhomeliness" experienced by the colonized, a sense of not fully belonging to any one culture or space (Bhabha 13). Sor Juana's intellectual endeavors, though rooted in the European tradition, are always marked by her status as a woman in a patriarchal and colonial society, creating a profound sense of dislocation and ambivalence that reflects Bhabha's understanding of cultural hybridity.

Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" further illuminates the ways in which Sor Juana negotiates her cultural and intellectual identity. The "Third Space" is not merely a site of cultural fusion but a space where new forms of identity and resistance emerge. Bhabha claims that this space is "the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference" (Bhabha 36). In *The Answer*, Sor Juana occupies this space

as she constructs a self that defies the binaries of colonizer/colonized and male/female. Her use of scholastic argumentation and theological discourse enables her to assert intellectual authority, while her position as a woman in a colonial context ensures that this authority remains precarious and contested. The hybridity of her identity, formed in this "Third Space," reflects the broader tensions inherent in colonial cultural encounters, where identity is constantly negotiated and redefined.

Thus, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *The Answer* can be understood as a profound performance of hybridity and post-colonial resistance through the lens of Bhabhian analysis. Her text exemplifies the ambivalence and complexity of colonial identity, as she navigates the intersections of gender, culture, and power. Through mimicry, subversion, and the articulation of a hybrid intellectual identity, Sor Juana engages with the crisis of cultural identity in ways that both reflect and challenge the colonial structures of her time. Bhabha's theories provide a critical framework for understanding the nuanced ways in which Sor Juana constructs and performs her identity, revealing the complexities of post-colonial subjectivity in colonial Mexico.

## 1.4 Research Questions

1. How does *The Answer* reflect Sor Juana's experience of navigating multiple, conflicting identities under colonial and patriarchal rule?
2. How does *The Answer* express the crisis of cultural identity in the colonial world, and how does Sor Juana navigate this tension?

## 1.5 Research Objectives

1. To explore how Sor Juana uses her writing in *The Answer* to balance and challenge the roles imposed on her as a woman and scholar in a colonial world, focusing on how she subtly resists both patriarchal and colonial power through Bhabha's ideas of mimicry and ambivalence.
2. To examine how Sor Juana's identity as a criolla born in the Americas but educated in European traditions—creates a tension in *The Answer*, and how her work reflects the broader identity struggles of living between two cultures in colonial Mexico.
3. To understand how Sor Juana's feelings of alienation within both the Church and colonial society fuel her intellectual resistance, turning her sense of being an outsider into a powerful critique of the structures that sought to silence her.

## 1.6 Methodology

To explore the performances of hybridity and post-colonialism in *The Answer* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz through a Bhabhian lens, this methodology focuses on how Sor Juana's text embodies the complexities of identity under colonial rule. Using Homi K. Bhabha's theories of postcolonialism, particularly his ideas of hybridity, mimicry, and the Third Space, this analysis seeks to understand how Sor Juana negotiates her identity as a colonial subject, a woman, and an intellectual in 17th-century New Spain.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is key to this analysis. It suggests that colonial identity is never a simple binary of colonizer and colonized but rather a mixture of influences where power is both imposed and resisted. In Sor Juana's case, her identity as a creole woman—born in the New World but tied to European traditions—places her in a space of cultural and intellectual negotiation. Methodologically, this study closely examines how Sor Juana's writing reflects this hybrid identity. For example, in *The*

*Answer*, Sor Juana invokes classical, religious, and intellectual traditions inherited from Europe while infusing them with her own voice, shaped by her colonial context.

This blending, or hybridity, becomes a form of resistance, as she uses the very tools of the colonizer's intellectual traditions to assert her own identity.

Bhabha's idea of mimicry further sharpens this investigation. Mimicry, in post-colonial theory, refers to how colonized subjects often imitate the colonizer's ways, but with subtle differences that can disrupt colonial authority. Sor Juana's engagement with patriarchal, Eurocentric intellectual traditions can be seen as a form of mimicry. She adopts the language and forms of male-dominated scholarly discourse, but she does so with a difference that challenges the very structures that exclude her. For instance, in her argument defending women's intellectual capabilities, Sor Juana uses theological and philosophical reasoning, the same tools used to marginalize women, to assert her equality. This act of mimicry—almost but not quite replicating the colonizer's intellectual voice—creates a space for subversion within the colonial order, as she both fits into and disrupts the expectations placed on her as a colonial woman.

In applying Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, this study explores how Sor Juana's writing creates a space that is neither fully colonizer nor colonized but something new—a hybrid space where her identity is articulated. Bhabha describes the Third Space as a site of negotiation, where the colonized subject can redefine themselves in ways that escape the control of colonial power. For Sor Juana, this means her writing is not just a passive reflection of colonial authority but a place where she actively shapes her own intellectual and cultural identity. This is particularly visible in the way she engages with the religious and intellectual authorities of her time. Rather than merely accepting their authority, she enters into dialogue with them, positioning herself within their world but also creating a space where her voice can challenge and redefine the boundaries of that world.

The methodology also engages with Bhabha's notion of the colonial gaze—the way in which colonial powers attempt to fix the identity of colonized subjects. Sor Juana's writing is aware of how her intellectual identity is being watched and judged by the patriarchal structures around her, especially the Church and the male intellectual elite. However, in *The Answer*, she anticipates this scrutiny and turns it back on her critics, performing a self-defense that both acknowledges the colonial gaze and resists its attempts to confine her. This dynamic is explored by analyzing how Sor Juana's writing constructs a careful, self-aware identity that maneuvers within these constraints while still asserting her intellectual agency.

So, this study looks at the performative nature of *The Answer*. Bhabha's idea of performativity emphasizes how identities are not fixed but are constantly created and recreated through actions and speech. Sor Juana's text, framed as a letter responding to her critics, can be read as a performance of resistance. Her use of dialogue, irony, and rhetorical strategies turns her text into more than just a defense of her intellectual rights—it becomes a staged act of defiance against the colonial and patriarchal powers that seek to limit her. By examining these rhetorical techniques, the methodology shows how Sor Juana's writing itself becomes a space of performance, where she enacts her own intellectual freedom in a way that challenges the authority of the colonial order.

Thus, this methodological approach, grounded in Bhabha's post-colonial theory, reveals how *The Answer* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is not just a text of defense but a complex performance of identity negotiation. By focusing on concepts like hybridity, mimicry, the Third Space, and the colonial gaze, this study shows how Sor Juana's writing operates within and against the colonial structures of power,



offering a nuanced look at how post-colonial subjects can resist and reconfigure their identities within oppressive systems. This analysis not only uncovers the deep tensions in Sor Juana's negotiation of her cultural identity but also highlights how post-colonial theory, particularly Bhabha's framework, provides critical tools for understanding the layered, dynamic nature of resistance in colonial contexts.

## 1.7 Results and Discussion

In *The Answer* (Respuesta a Sor Filotea), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz grapples with the intricate challenges of cultural and gender identity in the deeply hierarchical and restrictive setting of colonial New Spain. Written in 1691, *The Answer* serves as a personal, intellectual, and theological defense of her right to pursue knowledge, offering an important text for post-colonial analysis. Sor Juana occupies a unique space where her identity as a nun, a scholar, a woman, and a colonial subject intersect, creating a complex narrative. By applying Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, it becomes clear how *The Answer* not only captures but also critiques the cultural identity crisis of the colonial world. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" and the way identity is performed offer a critical perspective for exploring Sor Juana's complex negotiation of colonial and patriarchal expectations. In this light, her work can be seen as both a response to and a resistance against the roles imposed on her, especially within the realms of knowledge, gender, and colonial authority.

To understand how *The Answer* reflects Sor Juana's struggle with conflicting identities under both colonial and patriarchal control, it's crucial to first consider the historical and social context of 17th-century New Spain. Sor Juana was marginalized not just as a woman in a society dominated by men, but also as a subject of the Spanish Empire, positioned between multiple layers of power and subjugation. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which takes shape in a "third space," helps to make sense of this layered identity. He explains that this space "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (Bhabha 55). Sor Juana, within her work, creates such a space—a fluid area where she embraces, resists, and ultimately transforms the roles society assigns to her.

One of the clearest manifestations of this tension is found in Sor Juana's identity as a scholar, which conflicts with the roles prescribed to women in her society. The heart of *The Answer* revolves around the clash between her intellectual pursuits and the limited roles available to women in religious and colonial life. Throughout the text, Sor Juana presents herself as a devout Christian, adhering to the norms expected of a nun. Yet, she simultaneously defends her right to pursue knowledge—a subtle rebellion against the constraints placed upon her. For instance, she writes, "I do not study in order to write, and even less to teach – which, as you know, would be to fail in my duty as a woman – but simply to see if by studying I can become less ignorant" (Cruz 63). Sor Juana's defense is a careful negotiation; she acknowledges the societal rules she is bound by but questions them through her actions. This dual position mirrors Bhabha's "ambivalence of colonial discourse," where those subject to colonial rule both conform to and subvert the powers that dominate them (Bhabha 125).

The complexity of Sor Juana's identity also reflects the broader struggles faced by colonial intellectuals of her time. They were caught between expressing themselves fully and adhering to the limitations imposed by the Church and colonial authorities. *The Answer* showcases this crisis of cultural identity. As an intellectual in a colonial setting, Sor Juana's scholarly pursuits drew from the European traditions of her colonizers while, at the same time, often challenging the systems of authority that these traditions represented. Bhabha describes this process as one of mimicry, where the colonial subject imitates the colonizer but, in doing so, creates subtle differences that challenge colonial authority (Bhabha 88). Sor

Juana, through her engagement with European philosophy, theology, and literature, mimics the intellectual traditions of the Spanish, yet her work critiques the very power structures that enforce these traditions. She writes, "Although it is unseemly for a woman to engage in debate, I cannot but defend myself when I am accused of not using my reason" (Cruz 72). Here, Sor Juana not only asserts her intellectual capabilities but also challenges the gendered constraints imposed by colonial and religious institutions.

Sor Juana's linguistic choices in *The Answer* further illustrate the crisis of identity she experienced. As a colonial subject, she wrote in Spanish, the language of the colonizers. However, her philosophical discourse often interrogated the very systems of power tied to that language. This reflects Bhabha's idea of hybridity as existing in a "third space," where meaning is constantly negotiated between conflicting identities. According to Bhabha, this space allows for new forms of identity to emerge but also makes visible the instability of colonial power. Sor

Juana's use of language in *The Answer* exemplifies this concept of hybridity. She operates within the language of the colonizers, yet her writings express her individual identity and challenge the constraints of the colonial world. In this way, her work becomes an act of resistance, navigating the tensions between colonial authority and her own intellectual freedom.

Sor Juana's complex negotiation is also evident in her relationship with religious authority. As a nun, she was expected to obey the dictates of the Church, yet her pursuit of knowledge and inquiry often ran counter to the expectations placed on women in religious life. In *The Answer*, she reflects on the contradictions of her position as a woman of faith and a scholar. Sor Juana famously quips, "If Aristotle had cooked, he would have written much more" (Cruz 85), highlighting the gendered division of labor and the exclusion of women from intellectual life. By referencing Aristotle, Sor Juana aligns herself with the great male thinkers of Western philosophy, but she does so in a way that critiques the systems that deny women the same opportunities. This act of positioning herself within a traditionally male intellectual lineage while also critiquing it aligns with Bhabha's concept of the "third space," where identity is formed through negotiation between opposing cultural forces. In invoking Aristotle, Sor Juana mimics the intellectual tradition of male philosophers while simultaneously subverting patriarchal norms, using these figures to assert her own intellectual authority as a woman.

Sor Juana's hybridity goes beyond gender and intellectual identity, extending to her position as a colonial subject in New Spain. As a Creole woman—someone born in the colonies of European descent—Sor Juana existed in a liminal space, neither fully European nor fully indigenous. This hybridity shaped her intellectual life as well. Sor Juana was well-versed in European philosophy and theology, but her intellectual world was also deeply informed by the indigenous cultures of Mexico. In *The Answer*, Sor Juana demonstrates her knowledge of European traditions but also indirectly challenges the cultural hierarchies that privilege European knowledge over indigenous forms of understanding. This blending of traditions reflects Bhabha's understanding of hybridity as a space of both resistance and potential. Sor Juana's intellectual work challenges the colonial binary that positioned European culture as superior and indigenous culture as inferior. In recognizing the value of both, she disrupts the rigid categories of colonial power, asserting her own identity as a hybrid subject who exists beyond the limiting categories of colonial identity.

The personal crisis of identity that Sor Juana addresses in *The Answer* is also a broader reflection of the condition faced by many colonial subjects in New Spain. Sor Juana's struggle with the competing demands of gender, religion, and colonialism reveals the contradictions inherent in colonial identity.

Her work embodies the "ambivalence of colonial discourse," where she navigates the pressure to conform to the ideologies of colonial and patriarchal systems while also finding ways to resist them. Bhabha's idea of mimicry helps explain this dynamic. As Bhabha argues, mimicry both affirms the colonizer's authority and undermines it by introducing subtle differences. Sor Juana's mimicry of European intellectual traditions affirms her place within colonial structures but simultaneously challenges the notion that these traditions belong exclusively to European men. Through her writing, she asserts her own intellectual agency within a system that seeks to constrain it.

**In conclusion**, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *The Answer* is a sophisticated expression of hybridity, encapsulating the crisis of cultural identity faced by colonial subjects. By applying Bhabha's theory of hybridity, we see how Sor Juana navigates the conflicting demands placed on her as a woman, a nun, and a colonial subject. Her work exemplifies the tensions inherent in the "third space," where identity is neither fully compliant nor entirely resistant to the structures of power.

Sor Juana's defense of her intellectual pursuits, despite the limitations imposed by colonialism and patriarchy, reveals the complexity of navigating identity in a colonial world. Her writing is not just a reflection of this crisis but an active site of resistance, where she negotiates and reimagines her identity in ways that challenge the boundaries imposed on her. Through this process, Sor Juana transforms the crisis of cultural identity into an opportunity for empowerment and intellectual assertion.

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