

PART II:
MODELS AND GENRES

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSATLANTIC INTERACTIONS: SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WOMEN AUTHORS AND LITERARY SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS¹

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By the seventeenth century the place of women authors in the “Republic of Letters” was no longer confined to the convent; it fully embraced the secular, and so did the ways in which they manifested literary self-consciousness.² This was especially true with regard to Iberia, but also applied to colonial America, thanks to transatlantic cultural exchanges and the establishment of the printing press in Mexico in 1539, both of which facilitated a relatively free circulation of books across the Old and New Worlds (Toribio Medina 1907-9; Torre Revello 1957; Leonard 1959 and 1992; Rueda Ramírez 1999). The rise in female authorship was strikingly endorsed by the inclusion of significant numbers of women authors in Spain’s first literary bibliographies, the four-volume *Hispaniae Bibliotheca* by Andreas Schott, published in Frankfurt between 1603 and 1608, and later, more significantly, the two-volume *Bibliotheca Hispana Nova* by Nicolás Antonio, published in Rome in 1672. The pattern of their entries suggests that, whether male or female, a writer could be considered an “author” worthy of inclusion in the *bibliotheca* or library of a national literature if s/he produced some noteworthy writing of any kind or on any subject, in Latin or vernacular, whether in manuscript or print form (though printed texts are cited in greater numbers, presumably because they were more accessible). This broad view of the author-function—to use Foucault’s term (1977, 124-127)—was shared also within the French context, as Roger Chartier noted (1994, 40-42).

Poetry continued to be the field most cultivated by women, and a common starting point of many for a literary career. As María de Zayas observed in 1637 in the prologue to her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*:

[E]n viendo cualquiera [libro], nuevo o antiguo, deajo la almohadilla y no sosiego hasta que le paso. De esta inclinación nació la noticia; de la noticia el buen gusto; y *de todo hacer versos, hasta escribir estas Novelas*. (2000, 161, my emphasis)

Aside from poetry and prose fiction, however, seventeenth-century women also authored and published drama, and even *relaciones de sucesos*, which corresponded to what we should now call newspaper journalism.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whereas *poema*, *fábula*, *comedia*, and *novela* evoked literary genres, terms such as *relación*, *historia*, *crónica*, *década*, or *noticia* were associated with historiography (Simón Díaz 2000, 82). Naturally, the boundaries between genres were sometimes deliberately blurred to avoid censorship. The *relación de sucesos* was no exception; its declared purpose was to inform, but also to entertain the reader. Accordingly some *relaciones* were written in verse, some in prose, some were published as *pliegos sueltos*, others as books; the only constant was that the subject-matter should be news about real or invented events (Pena Sueiro 2001). Unlike modern reporting, however, the first-person was employed as a strategy to stress veracity. That the *relación* became a popular reading choice is suggested by a royal decree of 1627 by King Philip IV of Spain that sought to limit their publication in print (Simón Díaz 2000, 26-27). In colonial Mexico the *relación* enjoyed one of the highest public demands, as Angel Rama noted (1998, 47). Typically, institutions and private individuals commissioned them as a form of self-glorification. As Irving A. Leonard observes: “Writers dutifully flattered the paying patron” (1959, 124). Hence those who engaged in this type of writing were motivated by financial gain.

Despite the official recognition accorded by contemporary literary historians and the evident professionalization of women’s involvement in writing, however, specialists in the history of the book continue to read the manifestation of gendered perspectives in pre-1700 female-authored texts as marginal and extra-literary. Consequently, women writers are rarely spoken of as “authors” in our sense; and when they are, adjectives such as “extraordinary”, “unique” or “rare” are all too often pressed into service to justify the omission of women in studies of the beginnings of the literary profession (Porqueras Mayo 1965 and 1968; Rodríguez Moñino 1968, Cruickshank 1978; Strosetzky 1997). Only in the eighteenth century do women writers begin to be defined by modern critics as “authors” (see Palacios Fernández 2002). In the following examination of two examples of women’s literary self-consciousness—a vital component in the relation

between gender and discourse—I shall argue that this traditional approach is incorrect.

Since texts have both social and aesthetic dimensions, the study of literature, men's and women's, must presuppose a "communication circuit", to use Darnton's term. This runs:

From the author to the publisher (if the publisher does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affects their texts. (2006, 11)

Hence public texts are the result of a constant dialogue between human motives, intentions, but also conventions. It is noteworthy that, while all authors employed humility formulae, only women authors ever openly brought up the question of their gender in metadiscourse. This practice may be traced back to the fourteenth-century *Querelle des femmes*—the long, literary debate between authors who attacked women and those who defended them—, and thus to Christine de Pizan (1365-1430), the first known precedent of female literary professionalism in Europe. Far earlier, however, the Roman orator Quintilian, whose rhetorical precepts were considered canonical by Renaissance authors, recommended such appeals to gender for the purpose of the *captatio benevolentiae*:

Sex, age and situation are [...] important considerations, as for instance when women [...] are pleading [...] For pity alone may move even a strict judge. These points, however, should only be lightly touched upon in the exordium [...] But a simple statement will not suffice, for even the uneducated are capable of that: most of the points will require exaggeration or extenuation as expediency may demand. (*Institutio Oratoria*, IV, I, 13-15)³

In other words, adopting a gendered perspective in the literary context had long authority as a rhetorical strategy for winning over communities of readers. Hence the importance of gendered perspectives in paratexts, if we accept Adrian Armstrong's view:

The explicit attribution of a text to its author, in manuscript or print, implies at least the interest of book producers in the poet's identity, and may betoken authorial self-promotion; moreover, the author's identity is clearly much more prominent in an attributed text than in an anonymous

piece, so that readers obtain a far stronger impression of the writer's presence behind the work. (2000, 8)

An approach attentive to changes and consistencies in book history allows us to consider such rhetorical expressions of literary self-consciousness in any female-authored text as implying a real community of readers rather than as mere lip-service to a textual tradition. Gendered perspectives, male and female, should best be seen as strategies to incite empathy from and/or identification with potential readers (see Curtius 1990; Luming 1993; Genette 1997).

To demonstrate the degree of literary self-consciousness with which seventeenth-century women authors relied on gender as an authorial strategy of self-promotion, I shall examine two *relaciones*, one printed in Madrid and one in Mexico. Significantly, Cristóbal Gutiérrez de Medina, “abogado de la Real Academia de Mexico y cura de su Cathedral”, bound a copy of the Mexican *relación* to his own, noting that it had been written by “Doña Maria de Estrada Medinilla, simil de la famosa Seuillana Doña Ana Caro” (40). Ana Caro, the very author responsible for my Spanish example, was one of the most prolific and professionally-orientated women authors in seventeenth-century Spain, as Lola Luna observed.⁴ María de Estrada Medinilla, practically unknown to us today, was, as we shall see, an author of some fame in seventeenth-century Mexico. Gutiérrez de Medina's comparison therefore underlines my opening point about how forms of female literary self-consciousness were imported into America from metropolitan Spain—for neither the distance nor the different contexts managed to hide the similarities between the literary skills of the two women from the contemporary reader. In the following discussion of the two *relaciones* I start with an analysis of their paratexts, which served to validate a public image of the woman author, before moving to a discussion of women's metadiscursive practices.

As the title-page of Ana Caro's *relación* shows (see Fig. 1), the reader is promised a descriptive account of two significant events, though retailed in three *discursos*. Each piece of information is capitalized, though in different type-sizes. That the text was written by a secular woman author is made clear at the bottom of the page: “POR D. ANA CARO DE MALLÉN”. Below the author's name, clearly apart, is the imprint, together with the formula “Con licencia” in accordance with Castilian law as enacted by the royal pragmatic on state censorship of 1502. The book's genre and content are announced, in the first and most prominent word on the page, by the rare word *contexto*, instead of the common *relación*. This curious feature was probably designed to link with the use of the term *discursos*, “discourses”—also an unusual usage, since it refers in this case to poetry—in

order to give the text an academic appearance, or at least an echo of the ambience of the literary academy (King 1960; Simón Díaz 2000). In consonance with this more elevated generic pretension, the page-layout and format are those of a regular book, with a separate title-page and forty-three pages of printed text.

By contrast, the title in the Mexican *relación* occupies the same page as the first verses of the text (see Fig. II). The text's genre and female authorship are immediately stated in the first three lines. The more sparing use of capital letters here works to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the text is a *relación* by a named secular woman, Doña Maria de Estrada Medinilla. Only then does the small print detail the occasion of the *relación*, finally returning to more prominent print and capitals to name the publication's presumed patron, the new viceroy of Nueva España "DON DIEGO LOPEZ PACHECO". It is noteworthy that the title also makes mention of a specific addressee, but although allegedly directed to "vna Religiosa monja prima suya", she is given no proper name. The format is that of a broadside or *pliego suelto*; that is to say, it is printed on a single sheet, folded into four quarto leaves, the popular and cost-effective format for *poesía de cordel*, often printed in *tiradas* or print-runs of as many as 1500 copies. As was often the case with *pliegos sueltos*, it bears no imprint. Its omission, however, may also have been due to reasons of space and cost; that is, to avoid having to use two single sheets instead of one. To this respect, it is worth noting that Toribio Medina (1907, 198) described a copy of Gutiérrez de Medina's book in his own possession containing an incomplete but evidently quite different edition of Estrada's *relación* that recorded an important textual variant. His transcription reads:

-Relacion / escrita por Doña Ma-/ria de Estrada Medinilla, / à vna Religiosa prima suya. / De la felix entrada en Mexico dia de S. Augustin, à 28./ de Agosto de mil y seiscientos y quarenta años, / del / Excellentissimo Señor/ Don Diego Lopez Pacheco / Cabrera y Bobadilla, Marques de Villena, y Moya, / Duque de Escalona, Conde de Santistevan de Gor-/maz, y Xiquena, Señor de los Estados de Belmonte, / Zafra, y Alarcon, del Castillo de Garcimuñoz, Orque-/da, Fumilla, Alcalà del Río con su Puerto seco, Seron, / y Tixola, y Mondaua, y Arque. Alcayde de su Magestad, y su Se- / cretario mayor de Confirmaciones, y Mercedes de / Castilla, Cauallero del insigne Orden del Tuson / de oro, Virrey, Guernador, y Capitan / General desta Nueva España. / (viñeta). Dedicada / A la Señora Doña Antonia Niño de Castro. / (Filete). Con licencia en Mexico, en la Imprinta de Francisco / Robledo, en la calle de san Francisco
-v. con la aprobacion del jesuita Juan de San Miguel: sin fecha. -En la hoja 2. la licencia del Ordinario: 7 de septiembre de 1640, y dedicatoria á doña Antonia Niño de Castro: Mexico, 2 de septiembre.-(Falta el texto).

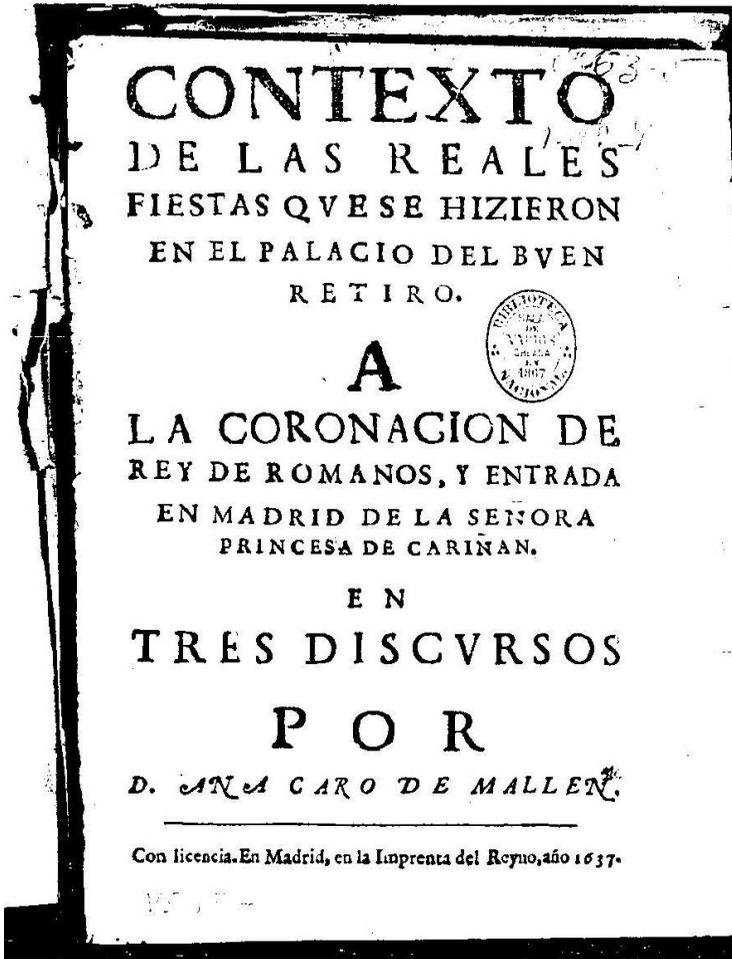


FIG. I: Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional V.E. 63-65, fol. 1

RELACION
ESCRITA POR DOÑA
MARIA DE ESTRADA MEDINILLA,

à vna Religiosa monja prima fuya.

De la felix entrada en Mexico dia de S. Augustin, à 28.
de Agosto de mil y seiscientos y quarenta años.

DEL
Excellentissimo Señor
DON DIEGO LOPEZ PACHECO,
Cabrera, y Bobadilla, Marques de Villena, Virrey
Gouernador, y Capitan General
desta Nueva España.

(*)



VISE salir, amiga,
(Mas que por dar alivio à mi fatiga)
Temprano ayçr de casa,
Por darte relacion de lo que passa,
Prevenir hize el coche,
Aunque mi pensamiento se hizo noche,
Pues tan mal lo miraron,
Que para daño nuestro pregonaron
Que carroças no huviera;
O mas cibil, que criminal cansera;
Lamentelo infinito,
Puesto que por cumplir con lo exquisito:
Aunque tan poco valgo,
Menos que à entrada de vn Virrey no salgo:
Mas el ser hizo efecto.

A

Y así

FIG. II: BL 1045.h.35 (3.), fol. A1. By permission of the British Library

Here the title occupies its own page, complete with a woodcut and imprint (México: F. Robledo); it adds the name of the dedicatee, Antonia Niño de Castro. On the verso is the licence from the royal censor, Juan de San Miguel SJ, and this is followed by another leaf bearing the ecclesiastical imprimatur and—this is the important textual variant—a dedication to Castro. The remainder of the text was missing.

Was Toribio Medina's copy the cover of the original printed version? Its *licencia* was dated 7 September, only nine days after the viceregal entry and five days after Estrada signed the dedication of her work. In any case, it is clear that Estrada's *relación* achieved sufficient fame to be reprinted. It is interesting to note that Francisco Robledo also printed another *relación* on the same event by a second woman author.⁵

Having established the typology of our two *relaciones*, let us move to their paratexts and what they tell us about women's literary self-consciousness in that period. The title-page of the Madrid text is followed by the dedication of the first *Discurso*, bearing the rubric: "A LA SEÑORA DOÑA / Agustina Spinola y Eraso". Though Caro is careful to approach the subject through praise addressed to Agustina's powerful husband she justifies choosing the wife as dedicatee as follows: "Si no desmerece por obra de muger, mas quando le dedico a muger". The appeal to her female reader as patron is thus made exclusively on gender grounds. In the prologue that follows this dedication the author's gender is not specifically mentioned, yet it is easily inferred from the feminine grammatical gender markers, and her identity is wittily alluded to in the deferential opening address to *letor caro*, "dear reader", where the epithet *caro* is an erudite Latinate or Italianate neologism for *querido* that by its very strangeness calls attention to the fact that it is also the author's surname. That the prologue is addressed to the general public and not just female readers is clear from the conventional masculine (i.e. common or unmarked) grammatical gender of the formulaic title *Al letor*, "To the Reader":

AL LETOR.

Letor Caro: si lo fuere para ti este Contexto, mas por lo que te puede enfadar que costar, perdonale este pecado a mi ignorancia, aduirtiendo que lo mal razonado dèl, es auerse hecho sin intencion de publicarlo [...] Suplicote le censures como tuyo, y le compres como ageno, que con esso, si tu no contento, yo quedaré pagada.

Yet, despite claiming modestly that she wrote without thought of publishing—a common humility topos—Caro's chief subject of discussion is

the eminently professional one of cost. This theme opens in the first line with the epithet *caro* (which in Spanish means “dear” only in the sense of “expensive”), continues in the supplication to the reader to buy the text (“Suplicote [...] le compres”), and ends with the pun on *quedaré pagada* (“I shall be pleased”, even if you are not “content”, *contento*, marked masculine; but also “I shall be paid”, marked feminine).

The paratexts’ metadiscursive markers of a female-gendered perspective are immediately taken up in Caro’s poetic narrative:

Por muger ignorante (ò claro Apolo)
Mal cursada en tu escuela, mi Talia
favor te pide, dasele pues eres,
preceptor de *vna clase* de mugeres. (my emphasis)

This invocation appears to align itself with erudite male readers through the appeal to Apollo, god of music and poetry, from an explicitly inferior female standpoint (“muger ignorante”) under the aegis of Thalia, muse of comedy and playful idyllic poetry. However, this humble stance is ironic, given that the invocation is made by a self-aware and highly regarded woman poet. Indeed, Apollo is appealed to as preceptor not of women, but of a *class* of women, a distinction which tacitly presupposes the god’s (and men’s) recognition of muses or women poets as a group, and as one that occupies a worthy place on Parnassus.

This subtle assertiveness behind the apparent topics of humility is also exploited for self-promotion among Caro’s female public. Her references in the poetic narrative to her female dedicatee, besides allowing extravagant praise of a fellow woman, are cleverly made to serve as indirect apostrophes to women readers in general, and thus to elicit their complicitous identification with her project:

A tu consorte generosa, y clara,
A cuya piedad mi ruego aplico,
Por Noble, Ilustre, Peregrina, y Rara,
Que admita mis borrones le suplico,
Si por muger, como muger me ampara. (my emphasis)

Caro’s second *discurso* is dedicated to a man, Gaspar de Guzmán, the king’s *valido* Count-Duke of Olivares, who at various times also patronized the likes of Lope de Vega, Góngora, and Quevedo, the greatest poets of the age. Caro’s practical aim in choosing him as dedicatee is revealed by the word *generoso* in the following passage, which broadly hints at generosity in the financial sense:

[P]orque saliendo debaxo de la proteccion de su Excellentissima mano, que mil vezes vesos, ellos [my verses] alcancen valor, V. Excellencia exercite su piadoso oficio, y yo tenga en la Grandeza, y vondad de V. Excellencia, generoso amparo.

As in the prologue “Al letor”, the authorial voice refrains from openly recalling Caro’s gender (though the fact that she is a woman may colour the appeal to the male patron to act as protector); but again, authorial statements in the poetic narrative (“Gviada del espiritu ambicioso”, “(O impulso de muger determinada)”, “Pues en vna muger tanto excede”, etc.); remind the reader of the writer’s female identity, as well as highlighting Caro’s self-consciousness as author.

The third and final *discurso* is preceded by another dedication, this time not to a person but to a place: “A LA MUY NOBLE, / Ilustre, Insigne, Leal, y Co- / ronada Villa de Madrid./ Nobilissima y generosa Villa”. This time the author’s gender is specifically mentioned as part of a *captatio benevolentiae*:

Suplicole, *por de muger*, reciba el don afectuoso, como tan generosa, admitiendole (aunque desigual) con la disculpa de tan heroicas acciones, pues por serlo carecen de ponderación. (my emphasis)

What significance could such gendering of the appeal have when addressing an abstraction? The answer perhaps lies in the concluding lines of the dedication, where the authorial voice implies that the ultimate audience might be Philip IV:

Dios guarde á V. Señoria con sumas felicidades, logradas en la vida de nuestro gran Rey Felipe Quarto, para que en su grandeza se aumenten las de V. Señoria.

Since, as we have seen, it was Philip IV who signed the royal decree of 1627 to reduce the number of printed ephemera, it was clearly in Caro’s interest to appear humble by stressing her femaleness.

Turning to the Mexican example, the first thing we find is that the prologue or exordium is enmeshed with the literary text. This is hardly odd, for, as Porqueras Mayo (1957, 100-101) observes, permeability is a key feature of prologues and metadiscourse. Nevertheless, the contrast with the Madrid text is instructive: there the reader, or rather purchaser, of the book is addressed in a separate prologue “Al letor”, whereas here we pass immediately from title to the first word of the text (marked by a 7-line wood-block calligraphic initial “Q”), and the addressee is apostrophized, in parenthesis, as *amiga* and in the singular as *tú* (“por darte relación”),

adopting the private epistolary convention of the *carta-relación* that ostensibly excludes the direct participation of purchaser-readers, leaving them to read, as it were, over the shoulder of the interlocutors:

Quise salir, amiga
(Mas temprano por dar alibio à mi fatiga)
Temprano ayer de casa,
Por darte relacion de lo que passa.

As expected, the first-person is used to stress realism. By referring to the addressee not as “cousin” but with the conventional poetic apostrophe “friend”—so frequently used to address the general reader—Estrada contrives to nudge the pragmatic situation from the private towards the public.⁶ What poses as an intimate communication between two female cousins thus takes the stage as a *relación de sucesos* by a named female poet. The very use of and play on the generic term *relación* in line 4 also point to Estrada’s literary self-consciousness in this regard; that is, by underlining the text’s literary tradition and her authorial first person. Moreover, despite the gender of *amiga*, the readership addressed is not only female. This may be inferred from the presence of various ironic gestures towards the topic of gender stereotypes in Estrada’s humility formulae:

Aunque tan poco valgo,
Menos que a entrada de vn virrey no salgo.

Contemporary moral precept enjoined women to practice modesty by staying as much as possible within the home, so that this statement works in one way to ingratiate a specifically male readership; but the incongruous exaggeration (she will go outdoors for “nothing less” than the arrival of a new viceroy) reveals a subversive attitude towards conventional mores that becomes explicitly ironic in what follows:

Mas el ser [the actual arrival of a viceroy] hizo effecto.
y assi quise cumplir con lo imperfecto,
Mudando de semblante;
No *quieras* mas, pues fui sin *guardainfante*,
Con que *auràs* entendido,
Que todo queda bien encarecido. (my emphasis)

The second-person address in the last three lines serves to re-engage with the reader by the familiar elision (*amiga/lector*) commented on above while simultaneously reasserting a female authorial voice, most notably

with the comic reference to her impatience to don the cumbersome *guardainfante* or farthingale—a symbol of modesty whose joyful abandonment for the frivolous social pleasure of being a spectator at a festival tacitly subverts the patriarchal order to which she had seemed, at the outset, to subscribe. The last two lines then follow this up with another significant reversal, as the authorial voice self-consciously contradicts the earlier modest *captatio benevolentiae* by praising her own text's worth.

Estrada's authorial presence is constantly exhibited through the first-person narrative and metadiscursive markers: “Donde mas que admirada / Quedé viendo del Archo la fachada, / Que tocarè de passo”, “Y aunque de mi discurso en esta parte / Ponderación colijas”, “Antes del Arco arriba referido”. When informing the reader that what follows is a poetic description of the viceroy she again assumes the mask of humility:

Pintar su dueño [the viceroy] agora,
 Quien tanto el arte de primor ignora;
 Aunque el objeto obligue,
 Mal lo comienza, y tarde lo consigue,
 Y epítetos vulgares, no son para las cosas singulares.

Here, however, where the subject-matter might be presumed to be more serious, her authorial stance is not humble on gender grounds. Indeed, the opposite is true, as revealed by another curious sign of self-consciousness when addressing the text's readership:

Que *alguno* aurà pensado,
 Que aquel descuydo todo fue cuydado;
 Aunque se està sabido,
 Que es aquella postura de entendido,
 Con que està dicho todo. (my emphasis)

By choosing the marked masculine form of the indefinite pronoun *alguno* over the standard unmarked or common-gender form *alguien*, these rather bold authorial statements on poetic skill seem to be consciously directed at potential male critics.

Further evidence of Estrada's self-confidence as a professional author may be seen in the fact that she wrote her *relación* with an eye to the metropolitan competition, as may be inferred from the following:

Y aunque el verlas te inquiete,
 Mayores fiestas Mexico promete:
 Mascaras, toros, cañas,
 Que puedan celebrarse en las Españas.

The promotion of further festivities in Mexico to rival those in Spain surely implies a promise to celebrate them in her writing too, and, in condign fashion, to rival Spain's writers by doing so. Final evidence of literary self-confidence is manifested in the concluding lines of the *relación*, and once again in the context, or disguise, of a humility topos:

Esto es en suma *prima*
Lo que passò, ò mi cuydado
Mal erudito pero bien guiado.
Perdona, que à mi *Musa*
El temor justo del errar la escusa. (my emphasis)

While the concluding apostrophe *prima* takes us back to the title-page, Estrada's allusion to her Muse reaffirms the text's literary rather than private nature; and if it is prone to error and hardly erudite, it is nevertheless well directed. In short, the text's ending makes Estrada's authorial self-consciousness all the more unmistakable.

As the above analysis has shown, a close examination of authorial self-consciousness in these texts leads us to question the validity of viewing women's authorship in the early modern Hispanic world as marginal and/or extra-literary, and in particular to challenge the view that contemporaries saw it as such. I would argue that disclosures of the author's gender in public discourse, be they in paratexts or in metadiscourse, are never casual—the notorious asymmetry between men's and women's practice in this regard is a sufficient indication—, and that though such disclosures are of course always rhetorical, always strategic, they cannot be dismissed as mere obedience to literary tradition. Even if women authors had themselves thought that all they were doing was obeying tradition their practice would have its own significance, but in fact it is clear that pre-1700 women authors self-consciously manipulated certain humility topos, perhaps even exaggerating certain issues, not because they felt humble but with irony and for self-promotional ends, or even to give pleasure. That women wrote openly as women in such a public genre as the *relación de sucesos* signals the degree to which their society had in fact accepted their right to a place in the Republic of Letters. Indeed, the two *relaciones* examined here both promoted women's poetic skills from an overtly gendered perspective, addressing a readership—not solely female—that accepted their authors as real “writers”.

Of course, the rhetorical situations differed. Caro's *relación* was published as a book with separate dedication pages and a prologue, revealing her greater involvement in the professional literary scene; this explains why she so openly appealed to her dedicatees for financial

patronage, why the profits from sales of her book were such an important issue for her, and why, in league with her publisher, she sought to evoke the prestige of the historical genres by use of the illustrious term *discurso*. The concern for sales necessarily descended to minute details of format and price. To find out that Caro's *relación* was written in verse the reader had to look inside; even that might help to sell it.

The role of gender in the Mexican *relación* was different, and in its way greater. Estrada's addressing her book to her *prima* or *amiga* might have appealed to women readers; it certainly allowed her to exploit her gender in literary ways and to represent an overtly feminine perspective. Of course, the alleged female cousin was a stratagem, in part designed to present the *relación* as a private letter and hence as unadorned and veracious news, as opposed to the courtierly flattery it actually was. The fact that Estrada's *relación* was printed in that most popular of forms, the *pliego suelto*, suggests that her stance of modesty was ironic all along, and that the Mexican reading public had no particular disdain for women authors.

Far from proving, as has traditionally been assumed, that women were exceptional or non-existent participants in the early modern Republic of Letters, the humility topics of benevolent captation in the two texts that I have discussed show, in different ways, how women participated as full professionals in the literary market. In short, these two female-authored *relaciones* demonstrate that gendered perspectives could freely be adapted to suit the rhetorical *contexto* of women's *discursos*, to adapt Caro's own terms, across the Hispanic world.

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Notes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international conference *Women, Gender, and Discourse in Latin America*, held at the University of Liverpool 2-3 March 2007. I am most grateful to Professor Jeremy Lawrance for reading this paper in draft and making some valuable suggestions.

² By the term "Republic of Letters" (apparently coined in 1417 by Francesco Barbaro) I mean early modern literary professionalism, particularly that encompassing the Iberian world. It serves to divert the emphasis from the purely financial implications of making a livelihood from writing implied by the anachronistic term "profession"—implications which are largely irrelevant both to male and female authors in this period—and underline instead the more relevant questions of social practice and authority (see Saavedra Fajardo 1999; Marino 1996).

³ "Multum agit sexus, aetas, condicio, ut in feminis [...] allegantibus. Nam sola rectum quoque iudicem inclinât miseratio. Degustanda tamen haec prooemio, non

consumenda. [...] Neque haec dicere sat est, quod datur etiam imperitis; pleraque augenda aut minuenda, ut expediet” (1985, II, 12-13).

⁴ “Ana Caro era consciente, como tantos otros autores, del valor de intercambio de sus letras –puesto que la escritura se había convertido en un bien de mercado y escribir en una profesión” (1995, 20).

⁵ The second author was Sabina de Estrada y Orozco. Were they related? In any case, the title-pages to their *relaciones* suggest that both women shared similar literary practices. See Serrano y Sanz (1975, 403) and Toribio Medina (1907, 187-188). I must, however, postpone its discussion as I have not yet been able to see a copy.

⁶ On the masculine form *amigo* Porqueras Mayo (1958, 165) noted: “Es frequentísimo. Con este tratamiento se atrae al lector ‘a la predilecta intimidad’ tantas veces aludida”.