

BETWEEN “ALLÁ” AND “ACÁ”:
THE POLITICS OF SUBJECT POSITIONING
IN THREE EKPHRASTIC POEMS
BY SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

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One of the primary veins running through the wealth of criticism on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is the attempt to understand the part her poetry played in the development of a Mexican national consciousness. While early- and mid-twentieth-century analyses of Sor Juana’s work tended to locate her aesthetic and political sentiments squarely within the Peninsular tradition, studies from the later part of the century often favored an Americanist reading of her life and writing.¹

Recent scholarship has identified problems with both of these readings, showing that Sor Juana’s subjectivity in fact breaks into multiple subject positions that rarely involve complete identification with the Peninsula or with the Periphery.² Efforts to understand this complexity can be extended by further analysis of one particularly rich area of Sor Juana’s corpus: a collection of ekphrastic poems that endow real or fictional portraits with political, social and religious attributes. The present essay builds upon recent criticism on literary self-fashioning by examining three portrait poems in which Sor Juana modifies conventions of literary and cultural representation by adapting certain techniques of the Peninsular writer Luis de Góngora. In “Romance 19,” “Romance 51,” and “Ovillejos 214” Sor Juana uses Gongoran innovations to position her poetic persona between “allá” and “acá” and transcend certain race, gender, and religious distinctions that ordered colonial society. In the pages that follow, I show how Sor Juana adopts Gongoran innovations in ekphrasis that claim for the poet a capacity to move beyond traditional concepts of mimesis, and how she adapts his expanded poetic function in a way that emphasizes the challenge such a new relationship represented to prevailing Colonial social structures.

Ekphrastic works, by definition, focus intensely on an object, thereby bringing the relationship between the poem’s subject and its

object to the forefront of the reader's attention.³ In Sor Juana's portrait poems, this focus on the object also opens an overt intertextual dialogue with certain highly original ekphrastic works of Góngora. In several of her most famous portrait poems, Sor Juana borrows images from the Cordoban poet and re-describes them from her own point of view. By taking a stance toward the object that is in part a construction yet also in some measure a faithful reflection of her real position as a Creole at the periphery of the Empire, Sor Juana finds a vantage point beyond the limits of a Peninsular or American worldview that presents alternatives to existing patterns of social organization.

In the seventeenth century, American-born colonials of European descent—Creoles like Sor Juana—found themselves in a dilemma with regard to their cultural and political relationship to the Metropolis. While Creoles bore no ethnic relationship to indigenous Americans, their birthplace at the periphery of the Empire associated them with the indigenous sector of society and generally divested them of the authority to hold top administrative and judicial posts (Leonard 40). Because of European practices of representation, Creoles found themselves suspended between Spain and America: while cut off from the origin of their cultural heritage for political reasons, they were socially segregated within their birthplace.

Sor Juana, the gifted offspring of a Spanish father and a Creole mother, experienced this suspension particularly acutely. In her struggle against the limitations imposed on persons of her sex and station, she forged complex relationships across the spectrum of Colonial society. Some of these relationships involved ruling members of the Church and viceregal court, many born in Spain. Others involved people of little prestige or influence, generally born in America.

In the revival of Sor Juana's writings that has taken place over the past century, two features of her poetry have especially influenced the way scholars have understood her role in the development of a Mexican national identity. The first is the spirit with which she inserts herself into the *culteranista* and *conceptista* literary traditions of seventeenth-century Spain. Though urged to write in the autobiographical, mystical style authorized for religious women of her time, Sor Juana elects the clever wordplay and preoccupation with technique of non-mystical male writers such as Góngora, Calderón, Lope, Quevedo, and Polo de Medina.⁴ This effort to insert herself into the Peninsular tradition led many critics, particularly during the earlier part of the past century, to interpret her political sentiment as Peninsularist and her aesthetic as a culmination of Spanish Golden Age letters in Spain's new territories.⁵ The second characteristic, however, is her inclusion of autochthonous American genres, languages, and points of view in her poetry. Referring

to America as "mi patria," Sor Juana incorporates into traditional Spanish literary genres such elements as the Aztec *tocotín* and voices of indigenous and black speakers critical of the injustices of the Spanish bureaucracy. This adoption of expressions of American cultural representation into *culteranista* poetry has led a variety of scholars from the later part of the century to interpret her political sentiment as fundamentally Americanist and her aesthetic as a literary transposition of Mexico's metamorphosis into a hybrid nation.⁶

Readings that reify a Peninsularist / proto-nationalist binary, however, over-simplify the complexity of Sor Juana's mimetic practice. A Peninsularist interpretation overlooks the ways Sor Juana's "homage" to Peninsular masters such as Góngora and Calderón often subverts the original purpose of the forms in which they wrote. A proto-nationalist reading, on the other hand, leaves unexplored the manner in which her orchestration of America's ethnic voices into a multiracial social formation separates her from other subalterns while simultaneously allying her with them. As her corpus attests, neither Sor Juana's self-conscious insertion into Peninsular tradition nor her sympathetic incorporation of American voices and forms of expression signify complete coincidence with either of these peoples or their beliefs.

In very recent years, several scholars have sought to move beyond this binary. Noting the heterogeneity of Sor Juana's alliances, these scholars have explored how the subjectivity she articulates breaks into a number of subject positions that rarely involve complete identification with one tradition or ideological viewpoint or another (Martínez-San Miguel 154). Such nuanced treatments of Sor Juana's Creole identity are a positive critical development. But they have included only indirect consideration of Sor Juana's use of ekphrasis, perhaps because this figure seems too exclusively aesthetic to illuminate the political and sociological issues in which many Latin Americanists are most interested.⁷

However, in an important study of visual and verbal representation, the comparatist W. J. T. Mitchell suggests that the figure of ekphrasis may provide a unique window on sociological motivators of change. In "Ekphrasis and the Other,"⁸ Mitchell argues that the verbal representation of visual works of art—the subgenre known as ekphrasis—invokes the specter of a social Other as well as that of an artistic Other. Frequently, objects of visual contemplation verbalized in poems take on characteristics of alienness, silence, passivity, and desirability—characteristics associated with racial, religious, or sexual others. When a speaking, seeing poet confronts a silent and seen object,

Mitchell suggests, the particular way he approaches the object's artistic differences can allegorize the ways society negotiates social differences.

In Sor Juana's ekphrases, we see both a reaction to current aesthetic theory and a commentary on the dominant social order through the intertextual dialogue she opens with Góngora. When she redescribes images from Góngora's own poetry, recasting them as objects of visual art viewed from her own perspective, Sor Juana addresses both his theory of literary representation and the underlying assumptions about social organization. As we shall see below, this aspect of Sor Juana's portrait poems frequently plays out in the way the poetic voice enters the ekphrastic moment to comment on the act of poetic creation. While her ekphrases avoid explicit social commentary or political naming, the attitudes they demonstrate toward the subject-object relationship convey implicit commentary on the manner in which speaking, seeing colonial author(itie)s related to the silent, seen colonial subject.

Here I follow the path opened by Mitchell, treating the act of artistic representation as a participation in and reflection of the social and political relationships that shape Colonial institutions. Because the ekphrases in Sor Juana's and Góngora's works are descriptive moments within lyric verse, they stand out as particularly emblematic of subject-object positioning in ways that demonstrate both an aesthetic and a social sensibility. In poems as seemingly apolitical as "El pintar de Lisarda la belleza" ("Ovillejos 214"), "Lo atrevido de un pincel" ("Romance 19"), and "¿Cuándo, Númenes divinos. . .?" ("Romance 51"), Sor Juana adopts and transforms Góngora's poetic innovations, centering attention on the way portraiture engages the poetic subject with its object and suggesting parallels between conventions of artistic representation and current social and political relationships. By following the metatextual and cultural dialogue Sor Juana maintains with Góngora in these intertextual poems, we can discover how her adoption and modification of his ekphrastic innovations establishes a unique position between Peninsular authority and the Peripheral Other that affords a view from both perspectives while limiting her to neither.

I. *Gongoran Intertext*

Among the various traits that characterize Sor Juana's portrait poems as a group, one of the most notable is the unusual prominence of the poetic persona at the scene of the object's description. Whereas in conventional descriptive poetry, the poetic subject avoids the limelight, focusing attention on the object he or she attempts to bring before the reader's eyes, in many of Sor Juana's ekphrases, the poet claims center stage, describing more vividly her own activities and

attributes than those of her object. This unusual attention to the poetic persona takes several forms. Sometimes Sor Juana eclipses the object by commencing the poem with a disproportionately lengthy meditation on the difficulty of her poetic endeavor. In "Lo atrevido de un pincel," for example, she focuses not on the painting which supposedly inspires her long apostrophe to the lady Filis, but on the daring involved in attempting this description. She begins with the request that Filis permit her to describe her highness's portrait—that she permit her to be like the giant who attacked Olympus:

Permite escale tu Alcázar
mi gigante atrevimiento
(que a quien tanta Esfera bruma,
no extrañará el Lilibeo) (13-16)

She follows this request by comparing herself to the eagle that beheld the sun:

¡Oh temeridad humana!
¿Por qué los rayos de Febo,
que aun se niegan a la vista,
quieres trasladar al lienzo? (21-24)

Continuing in a similar vein for more than half the poem, Sor Juana uses one metaphor after the next to evoke her own daring and devotion, dedicating to the painting itself only the vaguest of allusions.

Other times, Sor Juana converts herself into the poem's principal character by obscuring the object's appearance behind a blow-by-blow narration of the process of describing it. In "El pintar de Lisarda la belleza," Sor Juana disguises herself as the unschooled painter of Lisarda's portrait, using this fictive device as a pretext to discuss the challenges of metaphorical assignation. As she "paints," she offers asides on the difficulty of her task: "En fin, yo no hallo símil competente / por más que doy palmadas en la frente / y las uñas me como" (245-47) she exclaims, unable to paint Lisarda's eyes. She continues:

Más por sus pasos, yendo a paso llano,
se me vienen las manos a la mano.
Aquí habré menester grande cuidado, (. . .)
Mas puesto que pintarla solicito,
¡por la Virgen!, que esperen un tantito,
mientras la pluma tajo
y me alivio un poquito del trabajo;
y por decir verdad, mientras suspensa

mi imaginación piensa
 algún concepto que a sus manos venga. (. . .)
 Acabemos que el tiempo nunca sobra;
 a las manos, y manos a la obra. (307-09, 315-21, 327-28)

This aside creates a second portrait alongside the one of Lisarda that is actually far more vivid than the first (Johnson 70). For while the portrait of Lisarda is merely the Petrarchan profile of a conventionally static stereotype, the portrait of Sor Juana is a highly unusual depiction of an active female creator clapping her forehead, biting her nails, pausing for inspiration, paring a quill, and guiding a paintbrush.

In still other poems, Sor Juana draws attention to her poetic persona by fashioning herself as the critical observer of a portrait of her own self wrought by another artist. In the poem “¿Cuándo, Númenes divinos. . .?” for instance, we see this explicit focus on her poetic persona. Under the pretext of thanking her European admirers for their praises of her poetry, Sor Juana compares herself to the portrait of her these luminaries have created in their eulogies. With ironic humility, she asks:

¿De dónde a mí tanto elogio?
 ¿De dónde a mí encomio tanto?
 ¿Tanto pudo la distancia
 añadir a mi retrato? (5-8)

Her real self, Sor Juana claims with false modesty, is far different from the *retrato* her admirers have constructed:

No soy yo la que pensáis,
 sino es que allá me habéis dado
 otro ser en vuestras plumas
 y otro aliento en vuestros labios,
 y diversa de mí misma
 entre vuestras plumas ando,
 no como soy, sino como
 quisisteis imaginarlo. (13-20)

Because the “portrait” of herself to which Sor Juana refers is merely metaphorical, there is understandably little description of it.⁹ Rather, it serves as a pretext for asserting the poet’s true identity and a mechanism for establishing what most distinguishes her poetic persona: her difference from the identity imposed upon her by Europeans.¹⁰

The disproportionate attention to the poetic persona we see in these ekphrases, of course, predates Sor Juana. Colonial Latin American

poetry owed an enormous debt to the Andalusian poet Luis de Góngora, and in his own ekphrastic poetry, Góngora models a similar attention to the poetic persona. In its extreme aestheticism, Góngora's poetry played a formative if also highly controversial role in the discourse of empire, in some ways supporting and, in others, subverting the forms of thinking that rationalized the Colonial enterprise.¹¹ Sor Juana's focus on her poetic persona echoes one of the more subtly subversive aspects of Góngora's aesthetic. In Góngora's ekphrases, attention to the poetic persona highlights a use of poetic language to challenge Renaissance theories of aesthetic representation that held human representations inferior to universal Ideals expressed in the forms of nature.¹² Góngora praises human artists for creating works of art so perfect that they challenge the gods,¹³ and he describes these objects using a highly metaphorical language that collapses distinctions between physical categories such as color and elemental nature.¹⁴ Though ostensibly praising the architect or painter, Góngora's descriptions actually elevate the poet, whose figurative language can be seen to transcend physical limitations to rival universal Ideals with concepts originating in the spark of his own imagination.¹⁵ Such rivalry represents a challenge to conceptions of authority during the Colonial era. On an abstract, metaphysical level, belief in the authority of a universal aesthetic Ideal echoes the logic behind belief in other types of universal, absolute authority. Celebration of the triumph of a defiantly creative poetic persona challenges a hierarchical model of authority that informed both Baroque theories of aesthetic representation and colonial theories of political representation.

In Sor Juana's ekphrastic poetry, the devices she uses to draw attention to her poetic persona make it evident she intended to evoke this Gongoran brand of authorial defiance. In "Romance 19," for example, her expression of the audacity of her attempt to depict Filis's beauty draws together metaphors earlier used by Góngora to assert the daring of the human artist in two of his own ekphrases. In the sonnet "Sacros, altos, dorados capiteles," Góngora had described the monastery of El Escorial by reference to the myth of the group of giants who attempted to scale mount Olympus, one of whom was struck down with the mountain of Lilibo:

Sacros, altos, dorados capiteles,
que a las nubes borraís sus arreboles,
Febo os teme por más lucientes soles,
y el cielo por gigantes más crüeles . . .

Equation of the Escorial with these giants attributed a god-defying daring to the human architect who designed this structure so perfect its glow outshone the sun. In “Romance 19,” Sor Juana’s reference to her own “. . . gigante atrevimiento / (que a quien tanta Esfera bruma, / no extrañará el Lilibeo)” (13-15) attributes to her poetic persona a similar audacity. In another sonnet—“Clarísimo Marqués, dos veces claro”—Góngora had compared the painter of a portrait of the Marchioness of Ayamonte to the mythological eagle who alone among birds dared to fix its eyes on the sun. “Clarísimo Marqués” the poet asked,

¿qué águila, señor, dichosamente
la región penetró de su hemosura
por copiaros los rayos de su frente?

Comparing the painter of the Marchioness’s portrait with this mythological eagle was a way of praising the artist for so successfully penetrating to the essence of her beauty that he could reproduce what others dared not behold with their physical eyes. Sor Juana alludes to this myth as well, capturing “los rayos de Febo, que aun se niegan a la vista” and claiming for herself the power of Góngora’s acute mental vision.

In “Ovillejos 214,” similarly, Sor Juana’s showcasing of her creative activity exaggerates a kind of humorous aside found in Góngora’s *Fábula de Píramo y Tisbe*. Highlighting the wit of his poetic persona, Góngora describes the image of Thisbe that her lover Pyramus imagined upon finding her bloody cloak:

Esparcidos imagina
por el fragoso arcabuco
(¿ebúrneos diré, o divinos?
divinos, digo, i ebúrneos)
los bellos miembros de Tisbe. (405-09)

Góngora’s self-indulgent pause at this seemingly inappropriate moment to discuss his selection from an array of *culteranista* materials focuses attention on his own creative activity.¹⁶ Sor Juana’s request that the reader “esper[e] un tantito, mientras (. . .) mi imaginación piensa algún concepto que a sus manos venga” reprises Góngora’s use of this sort of aside to the ekphrasis to show her own poetic persona involved in a similar and self-conscious creative activity. As Góngora was both an icon and an iconoclast of seventeenth-century literary tradition, Sor Juana’s intertextual allusion to the Andalusian poet’s ekphrases allows

her to simultaneously insert herself into Peninsular tradition and to assume a stance critical of accepted theories of aesthetic representation.

II. Creole reformulation

While Sor Juana's use of images popularized in Gongoran poems emphasizes her adoption of his increased authorial function, however, it also foregrounds one of the ways she refashions this authorial function as uniquely her own. For at the same time Sor Juana styles herself after Góngora's Promethean defier of the gods, she also reformulates his audacious poetic persona in a way that politicizes his criticism of accepted ways of seeing. In the Cordoban's ekphrases, prominence of the poetic persona serves primarily to engage in debate over aesthetic representation. The poet's self-conscious and highly figurative, metaphorical language challenges categories of physical perception that mark imitation of external reality. But these categories of physical perception bore little direct relation to the categories of social organization that ordered seventeenth-century life. In Sor Juana's poems, prominence of the poetic persona makes the link between aesthetic innovation and social representation more transparent. For in ekphrases such as the ones we have just seen, Sor Juana links her power to see differently to an alternative perspective afforded by a sexual, ethnic, and geographical otherness, and she uses this alternative perspective to represent objects whose ambiguous nature defies the categorizations by sex, religion, and race that ordered colonial life. By noting the kinds of attributes Sor Juana ascribes to her persona and the challenges these attributes present to accepted social and political categories, it is possible to locate her unique vantage point outside the binary of Peninsular or Peripheral readings and to recognize the complexity of the reality she envisions.

In the burlesque *Ovillejos*, Sor Juana reformulates Góngora's aside-cracking poetic persona as a female who draws into question distinctions of gender. Seventeenth-century writers of Petrarchan poetry were usually male, and their verses disseminated a vision of women as beings of physical and moral perfection set apart from the functional activities of society (Johnson 65). Though this idealized vision of femininity pertained to the realm of the literary, it served as well as a standard for real women, who were judged by their ability to imitate this image. In "El pintar de Lisarda," Sor Juana humorously depicts the Petrarchan author of Lisarda's portrait as a woman—presumably the poet herself—and describes this woman in ways that violate prevailing expectations for feminine appearance and behavior. No aspirant to flawless physical beauty, Sor Juana chews her nails and

beats her brow with frustration; no virtuous example of moral perfection, she rejects her muse and takes motivation from the Devil; no passive product of discourses on femininity, she pursues inspiration rather than providing it for others.¹⁷ The object she “paints” mirrors her rejection of conventional gender coding. Lisarda’s throat and eyes are not sparkling suns in the heavens or parts of marble or silver statues: they are merely “buenos” and “carne y hueso.” Her hands, like Sor Juana’s, please her “no porque luce[n], [mas] porque agarra[n].” By depicting her poetic persona as other than the traditional male poet and combining traits that cannot be ascribed solely to any gender, Sor Juana transcends traditionally defined genders that played an important role in ordering the world around her.

In “Lo atrevido de un pincel,” Sor Juana likewise reformulates the Gongoran-style persona as a woman, though this time in a way that blurs categories used in religious classification. Counterreformation zeal for the evangelization of idolatrous peoples in the Indies occasioned a rigorous demarcation of the orthodox from the heterodox, and this activity extended beyond questions of a strictly religious nature to other types of human devotion as well.¹⁸ In “Lo atrevido,” Sor Juana inserts herself into a tradition of courtly and mystical love poetry, professing her devotion to her lady in terms both spiritual and physical: she loves Filis as a “sacrificio puro,” “solamente del alma” (55, 53) and also “bien como todas las cosas / naturales, que el deseo / de conservarse, las une amante en lazos estrechos . . .” (101-04)). While conventions of courtly and mystical poetry permitted a figurative interpretation of such expressions of physical adoration, Sor Juana establishes a crucial difference with these traditions by declaring that both she and her beloved are female, and not only female, but real, historical women known to have had an intimate friendship:

Ser mujer, ni estar ausente
no es de amarte impedimento;
pues sabes tú, que las almas
distancia ignoran y sexo. (109-112)

The explicit reference to her own and her addressee’s physical personae makes it difficult to read according to convention: Petrarchan poets frequently used physical terms to express chaste devotion, but these poets were usually male (Sabat-Rivers 405); mystical poets frequently used carnal terms to express spiritual devotion, but their objects were always divine.¹⁹ The nature of Sor Juana’s hyperbole and its dedication to a woman of flesh and blood thus evoke a contradictory co-mingling of the spiritual and the material. This ambiguity provoked accusations

of heresy on the part of her readers.²⁰ By depicting her poetic persona as a woman and combining traits that cross conventional categories of desire, Sor Juana blurs distinctions used to determine religious orthodoxy in seventeenth-century New Spain.

In "Cuando, Númenes divinos," Sor Juana takes her transgression yet one step further. The policy of categorizing people by the color of their skin was as fundamental to Colonial social organization as the practice of classifying people by creed. Colonial society has been described by some as a pigmentocracy, since custom awarded prestige and political power to whites of European descent and relegated non-whites and people of mixed racial heritage to lesser positions in the social hierarchy. In "Cuando, Númenes," Sor Juana corrects the inaccuracy of her European admirers' portrait of her by claiming that she is, on a metaphorical level, *mestizo*. Her *corpus/cuerpo* has been infused by the magic of the indigenous peoples from "acá" (i.e. America), a detail her admirers from "allá" (i.e. Europe) have completely missed:

¿Qué mágicas infusiones
de los Indios herbolarios
de mi Patria, entre mis letras
el hechizo derramaron? (. . .)
¿Qué siniestras perspectivas
dieron aparente ornato
al cuerpo compuesto sólo
de unos mal distintos trazos? (43-56, 61-64)

Sor Juana's admirers can be excused for overlooking this detail: in reality, the poet was ethnically white. But her ekphrastic fiction of a *mestizo*-spirited poetic persona allows her to problematize a European practice of categorization that mistook appearance for essence. Distinguishing people by skin color, Sor Juana implies, leads people like her European readers to assume similarity where there is actually difference and difference where there is similarity. People like herself confound such distinctions because they combine the spirit of multiple races behind the appearance of one. By characterizing her authorial self as Peripheral-born and infused with the inspiration of indigenous peoples, Sor Juana challenges supposedly obvious racial distinctions that presumed white Europeans or their descendants naturally superior to native Americans and blacks.

By reformulating Góngora's Promethean poetic persona as a social other, Sor Juana thus continues the Cordoban's aesthetic rebellion but renders its inherent philosophical critique more overt. Ekphrasis's focus on the subject-object relationship implicit in all lyric description allows

her to highlight the way Góngora's challenge to reigning theories of mimesis implied a challenge, as well, to social structures that shared a similar logic of authority. The hierarchical notion of a universal aesthetic Ideal found its correlative in the primacy of revealed Christian religious and intellectual truth. The logic that dismissed imitations of the universal Ideal coexisted with the logic that dismissed manifestations of this truth in non-Christian cultures. When Sor Juana adopts Góngora's model of poetic authority—when she styles herself as his god-defying giant—she adopts the manner in which his aesthetic challenge to the concept of universal authority hinted at a challenge to non-aesthetic hierarchies based on similar forms of logic. Ekphrasis serves as a strategy to draw out the subtly subversive implications of Góngora's aesthetic innovation for a Colonial hierarchy based on the presumed superiority of white, Christian, European culture.

It also serves as a strategy to position the poet between, rather than within the metropolis or the periphery. Its capacity to highlight the seeing subject provides Sor Juana with a means to ascribe fictive attributes to herself that demonstrate a unique power to see simultaneously from a variety of perspectives. In the poems we have just read, Sor Juana ascribes to herself attributes of sexual, geographic, and racial otherness. These attributes are, to a significant degree, figurative: though male in her creative activity, Sor Juana was, in biological fact, female; though born in the land of "Indios herbolarios," she was, socially and politically, a protégée of the royal court; though infused with indigenous culture, she was, in ethnic reality, white. By ascribing to herself figurative attributes of alterity, Sor Juana creates a discursive position that is, in actual physical terms, an impossibility. This discursive position is nevertheless, in some measure, a faithful reflection of the political and social position of the Creole. Like Sor Juana, the Creole fits only problematically into the categories that ordered Colonial life: he belongs to and is simultaneously estranged from the origin of his cultural heritage—Spain—as well as the place of his birth—America. This predicament affords a unique vantage point on Colonial reality—one that includes the perspective of both the conqueror and the conquered, the insider and the outsider. By adopting a subject position that draws together points of view from "allá" and "acá", Sor Juana transcends the limitations of a purely Peninsular or American worldview to suggest alternatives to the patterns of social perception that ordered Colonial life.

Notes

¹For readings of Sor Juana as part of Peninsular literary tradition, see Torres Rioseco, Carilla, Uribe Rueda, and Kanev. For readings that associate Sor Juana with an emerging sentiment of nationalism, see Lafaye, Ricard, González and Leonard. Martínez-San Miguel provides further documentation of this critical divide in Appendix V of *Saberes americanos*.

²See Paz, Moraña, Martínez-San Miguel, Benítez, and López de Cámara.

³For the purposes of this study, *ekphrasis* is broadly defined as the depiction in writing of a real or imagined art object. Devotion to an object of one kind or another ties ekphrasis closely to the genre of lyric, and the figure's expansion over the centuries to include new ways of "speaking out" or describing external objects has reflected some of the ways lyric has evolved to reflect changing relationships between the subject and the exterior world.

⁴For a discussion of the forms of discourse religious women were encouraged to use in Sor Juana's era, see Johnson (79).

⁵Uribe Rueda exemplifies this interpretation when he adopts Sor Juana into the Spanish national family as a "culminación biológica" and "verdadera cosecha . . . [de] . . . los frutos concebidos en el siglo anterior, el de la conquista" (113, 112).

⁶Lafaye, for example, describes Sor Juana as "knead[ing] the symbolic dough which would soon rise into a hybrid national consciousness" (76).

⁷Although studies of Sor Juana's portrait poems abound (see Luciani, Ferré, Bergmann and Sabat-Rivers), analysis of the actual device of ekphrasis in these poems is limited. One notable exception is the fifth chapter of *Art Inscribed*, in which Bergmann discusses the use of ekphrasis in "Romance 61" and "El pintar de Lisarda la belleza." Bergmann focuses on imagery and commonplaces Sor Juana shares with Góngora, Argensola, Trillo y Figueroa, and Polo de Medina, and ways Sor Juana's use of certain images changes and sometimes reverses the function of certain myths. While her study is helpful in explaining how traditional ekphrastic topics were adjusted to fit the cosmology and artistic theory of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it remains focused principally on artistic concerns—on the interarts commentary contained in poems' descriptions of the graphic object.

⁸This essay forms part of the second chapter of *Picture Theory*.

⁹Other ekphrases by Sor Juana—"Romance 19" and "Décimas 103," for instance—show similar use of the portrait as a pretext to draw attention to the poet's own activities and attributes. The flight from the depiction of a concrete object we see in these poems anticipates a development in ekphrasis more fully realized by nineteenth-century Parnassian poets, who decorated their poems with descriptions of natural objects and artifacts that generated the *effects* of works of art (stasis, depth, perspective) without designating their objects works of art *per se*.

¹⁰See Zamora for discussion of this alterity.

¹¹The roles of *gongorismo* in the conquest of the New World are discussed from different perspectives in studies by Leonardo Acosta, John Beverley,

Emilio Carilla, Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy. In its aestheticism, Gongorism is similar to another important discourse at work in the colonial Americas: Petrarchism. Though Petrarchism centers on the topic of unrequited love, in both discourses, customs, values and habitual attitudes that appear in poets' private and subjective experience of the world show up again in public situations where "cultures are being built, power exercised, and policies made" (Greene 1).

¹²See Panofsky for a history of the manner in which artists and theoreticians from the Classical era to the Baroque answered this Platonic notion of human art as the inevitably flawed representation of a universal Ideal.

¹³See the sonnets "Sacros, altos, dorados capiteles" and "Hurtas mi vulto" or the description of Galatea in stanza 14 of the *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*.

¹⁴Galatea's skin, for example, Góngora describes paradoxically as "púrpura nevada" and "nieve roja." In *The Poet and the Natural World in the Age of Góngora*, M. J. Woods labels this particular sort of conceit a "transelemental metaphor" and identifies it as one of Góngora's most influential contributions to seventeenth-century poetic language.

¹⁵See Bergmann's study of Góngora's use of the Prometheus topos in *Art Inscribed*.

¹⁶David Garrison's comments on this passage emphasize Góngora's self-conscious intention: "Pyramus is at this moment so overwrought that he is about to take his own life, and the narrator pauses to discuss a choice of adjectives with the reader. Unable to decide on these adjectives, he uses both 'divinos' and 'ebúrneos,' thus making the intrusion seem not only anti-climactic but unnecessary. The aside is, of course, extraneous to the story itself, but Góngora's focus, again, is on the telling of the tale; therefore the allusion to the act of choosing words is entirely relevant. He is humorously showing the kind of question a poet must decide as he chooses each word" (195).

¹⁷For further effects of Sor Juana's appropriation of the male gaze, see Luciani, Bergmann (*Sor Juana*) and Sabat-Rivers.

¹⁸Góngora's devotion to *arte por el arte*, for example, provoked accusations of heterodoxy and heresy.

¹⁹It is for this reason that the anonymous author of the titles and explanatory notes in the first edition of Sor Juana's first volume of poems (*Inundación castálida*) felt the need to remind readers of the conventions of this genre with his prefatory clarification, "Puro amor, que ausente y sin deseo de indecencias, puede sentir lo que el más profano."

²⁰It continues to provoke debate today, most recently in discussions of the poet's possible Sapphism (see Scott, Bergmann *Sor Juana*). While this question is an important one, I feel the principal significance of "Lo atrevido" is the way it mingles the spiritual with the physical in order to evoke a third kind of devotion that escapes conventional categorization.

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