

# EMBLEMS, OPTICS AND SOR JUANA'S VERSE: "EYE" AND THOU

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It has become axiomatic in Sor Juana studies that the Mexican nun was well acquainted with the emblem literature so in vogue in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Critics have drawn significant parallels between references in Sor Juana's work and emblems from some of the most widely known collections of the time, beginning with the enormously influential *Emblemata* of Andrea Alciato.<sup>1</sup> Emblem books offered Sor Juana and her contemporaries a repository of visual/textual symbols—the raw material for the creation or adaptation of vivid tropes, erudite allusions, and so on. Perhaps more importantly, they appealed to and helped to promote the kind of emblematic intellectual reflexes that we associate with Sor Juana and with the Baroque Age in general—an inclination to look for the occult correspondences between things and to manifest those correspondences ingeniously.

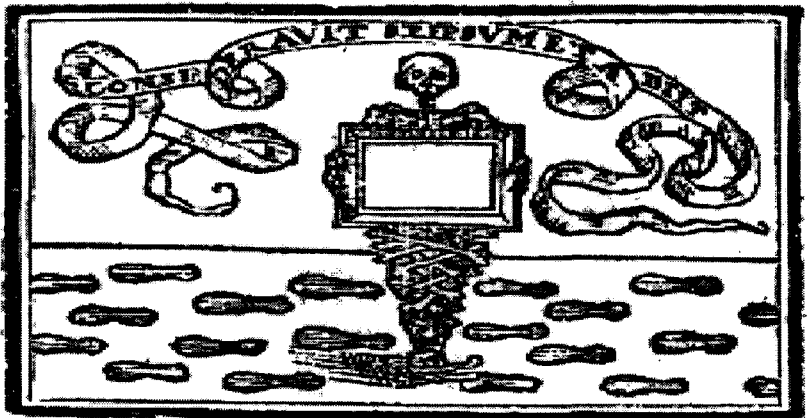
Conjoining image and text, emblem books also embodied a seventeenth-century delight—so apparent in Sor Juana's work—in semantically laden visual art, and, conversely, in ekphrastically conceived verbal art. The emblem was a perfect illustration of the prevalent idea that painting and poetry were "sister arts." Often cited in this regard was the assertion that painting was mute poetry, and poetry a speaking picture.<sup>2</sup> Sor Juana's reiterations of that commonplace were many. Indeed, entire compositions by the nun were conceived in such terms: her poetic "portraits," her *Neptuno alegórico* ("este Cicerón sin lengua, / este Demóstenes mudo" 4:403), even her *auto sacramental*, *El Divino Narciso*, which is introduced, in its preceding *loa*, as "una idea / metafórica, vestida / de retóricos colores, / representable a [la] vista" (3:17).<sup>3</sup> In a well-known *lira*, Sor Juana exhorts her reader, "óyeme con los ojos" (1:313), inviting him to see, not only in the epistolary poem he is reading, but in the scenes from nature that she directs him to read symbolically, emblem-like "ejemplos" of her love for him.

Many more such examples of Sor Juana's metaphoric and ekphrastic joining of the "sister arts" could be adduced. Their omnipresence in the nun's work suggests an intellect and a sensibility strongly drawn to the visual—indeed, interested in the phenomenon of vision itself. Such an interest is clearly evinced in references in Sor Juana's work to optical phenomena, to optics as a science. The most explicit of such references can be found in her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, in which she recounts having ob-

served that the lines of vision seem to form a pyramidal shape as they recede from the viewer. Sor Juana presents the observation as an original discovery, one of her "readings" in the "Book of Nature." In fact, this was a well-known phenomenon since ancient times, and was illustrated in a book that the nun cites elsewhere: Athanasius Kircher's *Ars magna lucis et umbrae*. Kircher is also the source for the reference in the *Primer Sueño* to the "linterna mágica," a device for projecting images. The *Sueño* evokes the legendary Lighthouse of Alexandria, with its prodigious mirror that captured the images of distant ships at sea. And the phenomenon of the "optics" of dreams is described, in physiological terms, in the *Sueño* as well.

Given these apparent interests, it makes sense that Sor Juana would be drawn, not only to emblems in general, but to emblems in which optical phenomena (light and shadow), organs (eyes), art (paintings) and instruments (telescopes, eyeglasses, mirrors) have a central role. Such emblems form an interesting subcategory within the emblematic tradition. They are, in a sense, twice witty because they are self-reflexive: if all emblems, as visual art, depend upon the optical illusion of reality and the optical apprehension of that illusion, these emblems are *about* those very phenomena. They serve as a reminder that, indeed, all emblems were conceived in such self-reflexive (and reflective) terms. Emblem books often were given titles that equated them with looking glasses: *Speculum amoris*, *Mirrou of Maiestie*, *Espejo de príncipes*, and so on. As framed images, emblems, like paintings, recall mirrors. More importantly, as didactically significant images, in whose allegorical depths the viewer may "see" himself, emblems serve as moral "mirrors" (Clements 67-68). An emblem might even represent the very notion of the moral mirror in a dazzling *mise-en-abîme* (illus. 1).

CONSIDERAVIT SE IPSVM ET ABIT



(Illus. 1)

But mirrors, like lenses, paintings, and so on, were also part of the technology of optical trickery; and that idea, closely related to a recognition of the fallibility of the senses, became part of the moral meaning of "optical" emblems. Such emblems may be read, therefore, as self-subversive; a genre which depends upon optics, which equates itself to an optical device (a mirror) and draws attention to the deception that optical phenomena and devices can produce.

It is this kind of "optical" emblem that constitutes the focus of the present study. The goal is, first, to trace parallels between such emblems and references in Sor Juana's verse, but *not* with the ultimate aim of engaging in a "source" or "influence" quest. The emblems in question belong to, but are not necessarily the origin of, a storehouse of symbols that transcends centuries, cultures, and genres. As Peter M. Daly has cautioned, "critics have been more successful when they interpret literature against the general background of emblem-books, using them not as sources but as parallels, or keys, to the understanding of literature" (61). In that spirit, this study will attempt to search out possible nuances of meaning in verses by Sor Juana, by juxtaposing them with emblems that they in some way resemble—or, if an optical metaphor will be allowed, to use such emblems as a lens through which moments of Sor Juana's verse can be profitably scrutinized. Since the moments in question fall in works that turn around questions of identity—that of the lyrical "I," the beloved "thou," or the plural "you" of whose gaze the "I" imagines itself to be the object—, this study will attempt to discern ways in which parallel "optical" emblems might help to explain the construction of such identities.

### *Visual Disenchantment*

In a 1986 article relating emblematic images to Sor Juana's verse, the distinguished Italian *sorjuanista* Dario Puccini reproduces an emblem of Alciato's,<sup>4</sup> which shows a "seeing hand," that is, a hand that has an eye (illus. 2). Puccini relates this emblem to Sor Juana's sonnet "Verde embeleso de la vida humana". Readers of Sor Juana will recall that this sonnet, written in apostrophic form to "la Esperanza," draws a contrast between those many who, "con verdes vidrios por anteojos, / todo lo ven pintado a su deseo," and the lyrical "I," who declares: "más cuerda en la fortuna mía, / tengo en entrambas manos ambos ojos / y solamente lo que toco veo" (1:280-81).

The conceit of the eye in the hand was in fact a popular one in emblem books by diverse authors.<sup>5</sup> But Puccini is wise to invoke Alciato; in addition to the latter's predominance in the genre and his accessibility in Spanish, his version comes closer than others to the way the conceit is employed in Sor Juana's sonnet—as an illustration of prudent skepticism. A non emblematic parallel to the conceit, as several critics have



(Illus. 2)

pointed out, can be found in Gracián's *Agudeza y arte del ingenio*.<sup>6</sup> Both Alciato's and Gracián's versions point us to origins for the conceit in antiquity, and there is no way of knowing where, among these many possibilities, Sor Juana may have encountered her "source." But the emblematic parallel is particularly significant, especially since the other prominent optical conceit in the sonnet—seeing the world through the "tinted glasses" of self-delusion—also can be paired with an emblem, in this case from the *Empresas morales* by Juan de Borja (illus. 3). The *subscriptio*<sup>7</sup> to this image reads:

las passiones y afeçiones . . . querran entregarse de nuestro entendimiento çegandole, y haçiendole juzgar, lo negro por blanco, lo claro por escuro, y lo falso por verdadero . . . Esto se da a entender en esta empresa de los antojos con la letra *sic animi affectus*, que quiere decir, *asi hazen las passiones del alma*. Por que como el que mira con antojos todo lo que vee le pareçe de la color que ellos son, y asi le parecen las cosas grandes o pequeñas conforme a la hechura que ellos tienen: de la misma manera las passiones y afeçiones del alma, hazen que todo parezca conforme a la passion que la señorea, poniendose delante de los ojos de la razon, y perturbandola de manera, que si es con amor lo que se mira, todo pareçe bueno, hermoso, facil, y gustoso, si con aborreçimiento aquello mismo pareçe luego malo, feo, aspero, y dificultoso.<sup>8</sup>



(Illus. 3)

The pairing of the two emblems—the deceiving eyeglasses, the eyes that “see” tactilely, and therefore in an undeceived way—with the parallel ideas in Sor Juana’s sonnet helps to point out some of the curiosities and unanswered questions suggested by the latter. What is the nature of the “Hope” that the poet addresses in the poem? Is it amorous, material, religious? Is it all of these—“Hope” in the abstract? What is the nature of the final posture of the “I”? Is it just prudent wariness, or something approaching cynicism? Why is there no middle possibility; that is, why are the only two alternatives the foolish self-delusion of those who see with tinted glasses, and the skepticism of the one who “sees” only what she can touch and hold? What would normal sightedness—through the ordained organs of sight (the eyes)—mean in moral terms?

Moreover, the two emblems that we are pairing with the sonnet are self-subversive in ways that, again, invite a second reading of the poem. Both emblems call into question the reliability of the visual sense—a significant paradox, as noted above, for such an art form. Both emblems imply, as an equally undesirable and impossible alternative, *blindness*. A person resorts to eyeglasses, presumably, because of defective vision; but if lenses distort and mislead, then how can one hope to see accurately? Similarly, the eye in the hand, while a vivid metaphor for skepticism, also implies blindness—hands cannot “see,” after all: the displacement of the visual to the tactile is, ultimately, a negation of the former.

But the two emblems in question, both in their particular messages, and *as* emblems, offer a way out of the paradox: they offer moral *insight*. All emblems are "blind," in this sense: they invite a mental operation on the part of the viewer/reader, a second step beyond the sensual apprehension of the image/text, one that involves the deciphering of its metaphorical essence. It is with the rational "eye" of the soul ("los ojos de la razón") that an emblem's message is assimilated; that message is a moral *desengaño*. And this, perhaps, is the route toward an answer to some of the questions posed above regarding Sor Juana's sonnet. Normal sightedness, in the sonnet as in Borja's emblem (and any emblem), is moral *insightedness*; it is a third and middle term, between and outside of the extremes of self-delusion and skepticism. The reader who carefully contemplates the sonnet—not just its ingenious conceits but its moral lessons—will come to "see," not with tinted lenses or blind fingers, but with the lucid eyes of the intellect.

Such a reading of "Verde embeleso" is confirmed by a recollection of the circumstances by which the sonnet was preserved for modern readers. The sonnet did not figure in the three volumes of Sor Juana's works that appeared before or soon after her death. Rather, it was taken subsequently from the 1713 portrait of Sor Juana by Juan de Miranda, in which it is represented as part of the picture: it appears on a piece of paper, on a table, under the nun's poised quill. The biographical inscription *on* the painting notes: "[Sor Juana] escribió muchos y elevadísimos Poemas . . . que antes y después de su muerte se compilaron en los tres libros de ellas, y que estan impresos; quedando otras muchas, y no menos insignes por su modesto descuido sin este logro (de que una de ellas es el Soneto que a la esperanza, hizo, y en la mesa de esta copia va puesto)" (Tapia 444-45). The exact circumstances by which this sonnet was thus preserved remain unclear. One source claims that Sor Juana gave the sonnet to her convent's *contaduría*, in which she served as keeper of the books for many years (Tapia 446). (If true, this might suggest that the "hope" to which the sonnet refers may be taken monetarily; the sonnet thus takes on a somewhat wry cast.) Another source suggests that the Miranda portrait was itself commissioned for that same *contaduría* (Tapia 446). If so, it would make sense that another treasure preserved there, the sonnet, would be chosen to be represented pictorially within the painting.

But that prosaic explanation fails to recognize the splendid aptness of the sonnet as a textual complement to the image within which it appears. First, the sonnet may have been considered by the artist as a kind of moral synthesis of Sor Juana's life, important enough to be placed just above the nun's biography (inscribed upon the painting) and beneath her hand (the nun appears to have just finished the poem and turns to face the viewer). An early, hagiographic tendency in Sor Juana biographers saw the nun's life in terms of a progression from mundane glory to

a higher, spiritual glory, a progression traceable in her rejection of worldly pursuits, her final penitent years, her heroic, self-sacrificing death.<sup>9</sup> "Verde embeleso" could be applied to such hagiographic ends: the nun declares her rejection of mundane "hope," and her clear-eyed embrace of a higher and more certain truth. Such a reading also includes a neat paradox: the "visual" knowledge rejected in the poem applies to tangible things of the world, the "tactile" knowledge applies to the intangible things of the spirit.

In another, more general sense, the painted sonnet could fulfill the function of a moral lesson on *vanitas*, similar to the symbolic objects that often appear in portraits and other genres of paintings of the time: clocks, snuffed candles, withered flowers and, especially, skulls.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, clocks appear on a shelf among Sor Juana's books in both the Miranda portrait and the other most important eighteenth-century portrait of Sor Juana—that of Miguel de Cabrera (1750)—, which reinforces the idea that these early portraitists were using a symbolic vocabulary of a moral, exemplary nature, to which the sonnet could be assimilated. It is significant that the sonnet is the immediate result (the ink can be imagined as scarcely dry) of an act of *writing*—Sor Juana's most important claim to worldly glory—from which she is portrayed as turning away, and toward the viewer who can absorb, simultaneously, both the dimensions of that glory and the lesson of its ultimate meaninglessness in relation to the higher truths.

The fact that that lesson should be communicated via an appeal to the tactile as opposed to the visual sense is, of course, the ultimate irony. The sonnet comes to us as part of a painting; the disenchantment claimed by the "I" of the sonnet would appear, ostensibly, to be denied us, since we cannot apprehend the sonnet—or any other part of the painting—through the tactile sense. We only apprehend it visually, yet the sonnet emphasizes the illusoriness of that which is apprehended through the arts of optical deception—colored glasses, colored canvasses. We cannot "see" the portrait with our hands, nor can we grasp the reality of what is represented in it with our eyes. We are left, it would seem, "sightless." As in another, more famous Sor Juana sonnet, the poem, the portrait, and the person portrayed upon it are "cadáver, polvo, sombra, nada." Yet as all dissolves before our eyes, we are left (if we have read perceptively) with moral *insight*. If "los ojos de la razón," as Borja's emblem reminds us, can be deceived, they can also be undeceived. Sor Juana's sonnet, like Borja's emblem and Miranda's portrait, when properly contemplated by the eyes of reason, is the agent of moral disenchantment.

### *The "I" Glass*

The central idea of Borja's emblem, as quoted above, is that the "passiones y affecciones del alma, hazen que todo parezca conforme a la

passion que la señora, poniendose delante de los ojos de la razon." Other verses by Sor Juana parallel even more closely this notion that the lower faculties of the soul ("afectos") can produce a delusive effect upon the higher faculty of reason. These verses belong to a set of compositions by Sor Juana that turn on the question of fame: the "I" presents itself as the object of the gaze of others. These verses are about self-identity, ostensibly not self-constructed, but (mis)constructed by others. That misconception or misidentification occurs when the "I's" devotees "see" her through the distorting lens of admiration or affection.

The example we shall examine occurs in Leonor's soliloquy from Act I of *Los empeños de una casa*, a speech whose quasi-autobiographical character is clear. In this soliloquy, Leonor tells her life story: like Sor Juana, Leonor is famous in her own land and beyond as a woman of great beauty and prodigious intellect. That fame has taken on a kind of life of its own, Leonor laments, the result of which is that she is admired far beyond her merit. Her admirers are deluded by their own fervor:

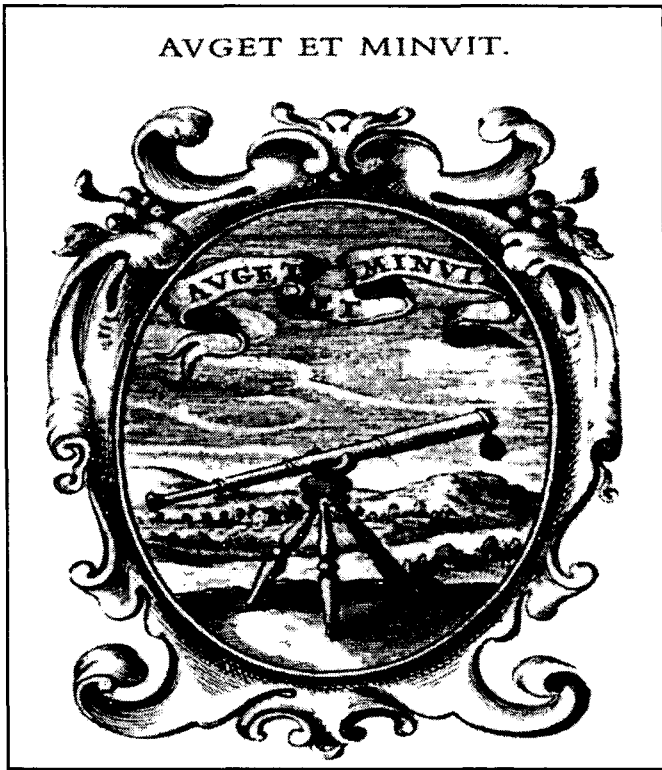
La pasión se puso anteojos  
de tan engañosos grados,  
que a mis moderadas prendas  
agrandaban los tamaños. (4:38)

Leonor's fame has spread, she tells us, in "reinos extraños." The verses suggest, therefore, a paradox: contrary to normal optical rules, Leonor's stature has increased with distance. Only a trick of perception, aided by a deceptive device, could accomplish this.

Another emblem may be opportunely cited here as a parallel to Sor Juana's eyeglass metaphor: the seventh *empresa* from Diego de Saavedra Fajardo's *Idea de un príncipe político cristiano* (illus. 4). The emblem shows a telescope and bears the *inscriptio* "Avget et Minvit"; like the telescope, the "afectos" distort reality by seeming to increase or diminish it. The author thus warns the prince to beware of flatterers and other deceivers at court. Interestingly, the text delves into the particulars of optical theory to elaborate the comparison:

No de otra suerte nos sucede con los afectos, que cuando miramos las cosas con los antojos largos, donde por una parte se representan muy crecidas y corpulentas, y por la otra muy disminuidas y pequeñas. Unos mismos son los cristales y unas mismas las cosas; pero está la diferencia en que por la una parte pasan las especies o los rayos visuales del centro a la circunferencia, con que se van esparciendo y multiplicando, y se antojan mayores los cuerpos, y de la otra pasan de la circunferencia al centro, y llegan disminuidos . . .<sup>11</sup>





(Illus. 4)

Implicit in this passage is the fundamental idea in optical theory of the pyramidal shape of the lines of vision. As noted at the outset of this study, in significant moments of her work, Sor Juana recalls the pyramid in passages that have to do with the quest for knowledge. In the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* she places herself at the base of a visual pyramid that recedes toward a vanishing point—an important moment of (alleged) empirical discovery in her “readings” of the “Book of Nature.” In the *Primer Sueño*, the pyramids of Memphis metamorphose oneirically into apexes to which the soul aspires in its several attempts to achieve universal knowledge. In both cases, the “I,” in a privileged place of seeing, is the agent of the epistemological quest. Even if that quest ends in doubt or failure,<sup>12</sup> it remains strongly affirmed, and redounds to the credit, the courage and the intellectual integrity of the seeker.

In Leonor’s soliloquy, as in other such “fame” passages in Sor Juana’s works, the “I” inverts the telescope, as it were. By turning the telescope upon itself, the “I” seems to relinquish the power of seeing to a “they” or a plural “you” of whose gaze it is now the object. But that gaze is distorted; Leonor’s (Sor Juana’s) admirers do not see her with the eyes of

direct evidence, nor with the eyes of reason. Rather, as if through a deceiving lens, they "see" her with the eyes of *la pasión* and base their judgments on second-hand information (*informes falsos*). They stand in implicit contrast to the nun herself, who elsewhere displays the integrity of her own intellectual constitution (her empirical curiosity, her methodological rigor, her prudent sense of the limits of her intellectual reach).

Thus, as so often in Sor Juana's verse, the "I," beneath an elaborate show of humility, finally affirms a strong and composed sense of self. The poet retains a privileged place of viewing; she sees others who see her as if through a deceiving lens, while asserting her own unrefracted, undeceived perspective on her admirers' folly. The "I" sees with the eye of reason, with moral insight. Thus, Leonor's soliloquy, like similar verses in Sor Juana's other "fame" compositions, does not really cede subjectivity. They are not a definition of the self only negatively (in terms of what it is not), nor are they a cancellation of the ego. Such apparent characteristics of the soliloquy are simulacra, which the discerning reader/public is meant to see through.

### *The Fixed Shadow*

That same sense of strongly affirmed subjectivity—in a more explicitly gendered way—can be brought out in another sonnet by Sor Juana, through a juxtaposition with an emblem that contains a significant parallel. The poem in question is among the nun's most celebrated:

Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo,  
imagen del hechizo que más quiero,  
bella ilusión por quien alegre muero,  
dulce ficción por quien penosa vivo.

Si al imán de tus gracias, atractivo,  
sirve mi pecho de obediente acero,  
¿para qué me enamoras lisonjero,  
si has de burlarme luego fugitivo?

Mas blasonar no puedes, satisfecho,  
de que triunfa de mí tu tiranía,  
que aunque dejas burlado el lazo estrecho  
que tu forma fantástica ceñía,  
poco importa burlar brazos y pecho  
si te labra prisión mi fantasía. (1:287-88)

The anonymous author of the epigraph that accompanied this sonnet in its first printing and in nearly all subsequent editions interpreted the poem in terms of "decent" versus "indecent" love: "que contiene una fantasía contenta con amor decente." This interpretation, which, not untypically for these epigraphs in Sor Juana's early editions, is a bit of a

moralistic whitewash,<sup>13</sup> has not held up well. Most readers have understood the sonnet, as Octavio Paz has said so well, as turning around the theme of the "fantasma erótico" (381)—the beloved who, sexually elusive, takes on, in the mind of the lover, a (necessarily) fictive or fantastic reality.

But the anonymous epigraph, along with the vivid command with which the sonnet begins, "Detente sombra," both invite a comparison with an emblem from the *Emblemas moralizados* by Hernando de Soto (illus. 5).

## MORALIZADAS

112

*Vera castitas.*

La castidad verdadera?



*Estando Laocón ausente,  
 Marcela, su muger casta,  
 Del pintò vna sombra vasta,  
 Para tenerle presente.  
 Era de mil perseguida,  
 Procurando enternecerla,  
 Mas no pudieron vencerla  
 De la sombra detenida.*

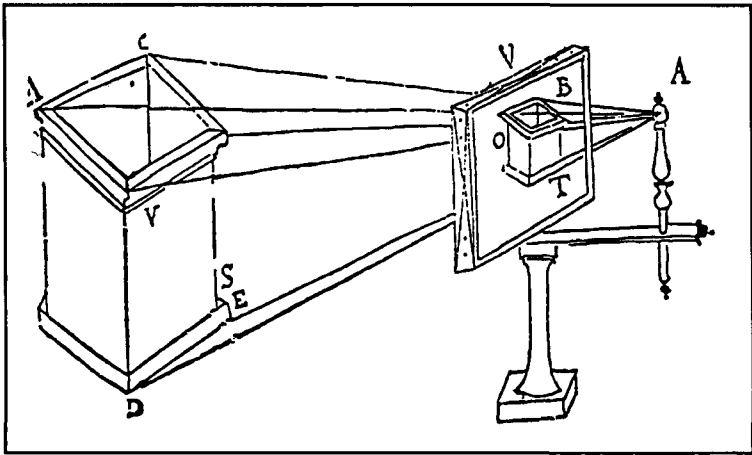
Bearing the *inscriptio* "La castidad verdadera," it shows a woman contemplating a painted male figure on a wall. The full *subscriptio* reads:

Estando Laocon ausente,  
 Marcela, su mujer casta,  
 Del pintó una sombra vasta,  
 Para tenerle presente.  
 Era de mil perseguida,  
 Procurando enternecerla.  
 Mas no pudieron vencerla  
 De la sombra detenida.  
 Finalmente fue la guarda  
 De su lealtad secreta,  
 Que la castidad perfecta  
 Ella a si mesma se guarda. (112-13)

While this emblem is not optically self-subversive in the way some other "optical" emblems are (it does not question the truth of visual perception), it does contain a kind of internal inconsistency. Marcela is the quintessence of wifely fidelity;<sup>14</sup> her chastity is supposedly so perfect that it needs no external enforcement: "a si mesma se guarda." But how does Marcela guard her chastity? By painting an image of her absent husband, under whose watchful eye she places herself. The implication is that autonomous chastity is impossible in a woman. Moral self-containment in a woman is feasible only to the extent that she accedes to the socially constructed authority (and, probably, innate moral superiority) of a male.

It is tempting, as well, to charge the emblem with an infantilization of the chaste Marcela: rather than merely imagine the vigilant eye of her husband, she literally paints his image (in the *pictura* we see that image represented upon a wall). Such a charge would be, perhaps, unfair; after all, emblems depend upon such literal representations of the abstract. At any rate, the phrase used to describe Marcela's rendering of her husband's image is noteworthy: it is a *sombra detenida*. This is more than a picturesque turn of phrase. In his "Deposición en favor de los profesores de la pintura" (1677), Calderón de la Barca evokes the legendary origin of the art of painting. Some young men emerged from the sea after swimming and, seeing their lifelike shadows projected on the sand, began to trace playfully each other's outlines: "De modo que para argumento de ser la pintura inspirado numen de sobrenatural aliento, baste saber que fue su primer taller la luz, su primer bosquejo la sombra, su primer[a] lámina la arena, su primer pincel el dedo, su primer artífice la joven travesura de un acaso" (Paterson 160). The idea was not only legendary; it corresponded to a practical reality as well. Devices for tracing the outline of figures were well-known in the Renaissance, and were employed as a practical

first step in the art of painting. An example, which Sor Juana had surely examined, given her acquaintance with the volume, can be found in Kircher's *Ars magna lucis et umbrae*, the *instrumentum mesopicum* (illus. 6).



(Illus. 6)

The viewer looked through an aperture (A) and saw the traceable outline of a figure projected upon a fine piece of vellum.

The *sombra detenida* of Hernando de Soto's emblem, with its reminiscences of the legendary history and practical art of painting alluded to above, invites us to look again at Sor Juana's sonnet. Critics have noted that the beloved who is addressed in the poem "enters," as it were, already converted into a disembodied, fictive figure.<sup>15</sup> To regard him as a "painted" figure—literally, or else, as in *Primero Sueño*, "painted" with the *pincel invisible* of the *fantasía*—adds a new interpretive dimension to the poem. The "I" addresses the "thou" with a command that converts him, at the outset, into an optical image (a *sombra detenida*). If this idea is taken in its most literal sense, the sonnet unfolds as an apostrophe to a portrait (for which there is precedent in Sor Juana's portrait poems).<sup>16</sup> The portrait "enamors" the lady who gazes upon it, but she remains thwarted (*burlada*), because the image of the beloved is intangible, elusive (*fugitivo*). The portrait exerts a tyranny over the viewer, but can take no satisfaction from it; the "*forma fantástica*" (the portrait, the gentleman portrayed) may mock the viewer's arms and breast (which cannot embrace an optical illusion), but the lady has the ultimate revenge. If she cannot physically possess the reality represented upon the canvas, she can "re-paint" the image with fantasy's "paintbrush." The beloved and his image thus remain "imprisoned," doubtlessly, as with the images represented by *la fantasía* in the *Primero Sueño*, in *la memoria*.

Far from Marcela's ceding of agency to a male simulacrum (a projec-

tion of the moral continence which, as a female, she cannot herself possess), and far from the resigned and passive virtue that the anonymous epigraph attributes to it, Sor Juana's sonnet bespeaks female subjectivity, agency and intellectual ascendancy. The male "thou" who is addressed is objectified, perhaps assimilated to a portrait in which he appears, and by extension to all such optical simulacra—ingeniously beautiful, but deceptive and morally equivocal (except as a warning to the wise). The female "I," on the other hand, triumphs because it sees through such simulacra; it sees insightfully. Thus, Sor Juana's sonnet is suggestive of the very idea of "insight" implicit in all emblem literature, especially in its most self-reflexive form, the "optical" emblem. Such emblems subvert their own essence: they belie the validity of visual knowledge even as they rely upon it to communicate a moral message. The recognition of that paradox itself becomes a part of the message, which is apprehended only by the eyes of the soul. And, lest Sor Juana's feminist assertiveness leave those of the myopic sex feeling excluded from the possibility of such inner vision, the nun herself reminds us that souls are, after all, farsighted and genderless: "las almas / distancia ignoran y sexo" (1: 57).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, the works cited by Buxó (*Amor y conocimiento*); Luciani "Emblems"; Paz, Puccini, Schuessler and Selig.

<sup>2</sup>See Hagstrum for a thorough historical review of the idea of the "sister arts."

<sup>3</sup>I owe these observations to Puccini and Selig. On the *Neptuno alegórico*, see Sabat de Rivers, "El Neptuno."

<sup>4</sup>Puccini reproduces the image from a Spanish version of Alciato; that image differs in small details from the one in illus. 2.

<sup>5</sup>See the various examples cited and reproduced by Henkel and Schöne, *Emblemata* (columns 1010-1012).

<sup>6</sup>See Sabat de Rivers (intro. to *Inundación* 24) and Checa 128. Checa also provides useful information on other textual sources for the idea of the "mano ocular," and for the notion that the "afectos" influence visual perception.

<sup>7</sup>The three parts of the emblem are the brief "motto" that tops the image, the image itself, and the elaboration and explanation of the image, in prose or verse, that follows. I follow Daly's use of the Latin names for these three elements: *inscriptio*, *pictura* and *subscriptio*.

<sup>8</sup>I cite from Henkel and Schöne, *Emblemata* (columns 1424-25).

<sup>9</sup>Indeed, the biography of Sor Juana on the Miranda portrait reads: "Murio con religiosísimas, y exemplares expresiones de Catholica y Religiosa, demostrando el acierto maior de su grande ingenio de saber morir" (Tapia 445).

<sup>10</sup>See Gallego (part II, chap. 2) for a review of such symbols. Both Scott and Buxó ("Heráclito") have noted the paradoxical relationship between "Verde embeleso" and the portrait of which it forms a part.

<sup>11</sup>I cite from the modern edition of Saavedra Fajardo listed in "Works Cited" (1: 128). This edition includes only simplified, schematic versions of the original

*picturae*.

<sup>12</sup>In the passage in the *Respuesta*, the nun concludes her anecdote of having observed the visual pyramid by wondering "si sería ésta la razón que obligó a los antiguos a dudar si el mundo era esférico o no. Porque, aunque lo parece, podía ser engaño de la vista" (4:458). And of course, the epistemological quests of the *Sueño* end in failure; the soul cannot achieve universal knowledge.

<sup>13</sup>See Luciani, "Epígrafe."

<sup>14</sup>The Marcela referred to is probably St. Marcela, the fifth-century Roman matron renowned for her chaste virtue.

<sup>15</sup>Buxó puts it in terms useful for my analysis: "El amado aparece, de entrada, reducido a las figuraciones progresivamente desmaterializadas de su ser (sombra, imagen, ilusión y ficción) para—así descarnado—pasar a convertirse en intelección pura, esto es, en imagen liberada de sus imperfecciones morales y . . . quedar prisionero de la 'fantasía' de la amante que . . . alude a cierta facultad del ánimo sensitiva capaz de ordenar y esclarecer el sentido de las imágenes guardadas en la memoria" ("Heráclito" 317).

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, her *décima* no. 103 and her *redondilla* 89.

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### Illustrations

- Illus. 1: Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, *Emblemas morales* (Madrid, 1610). Courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
- Illus. 2: Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Augsburg, 1550). Courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
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