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Performing Sor Juana: Reimagining a Mexican Literary Figure in the 21st Century

An Honors Paper for the Department of Theater and Dance

By Uriel López-Serrano

Bowdoin College, 2020

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Part 1

Sorjuanismo: Tracing Academic Devotion Towards Sor Juana

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–95), née Juana Ramírez de Asbaje, was born in the small town of San Miguel Nepantla, Mexico. A child prodigy, Juana learned to read and write at a young age, likely through the encouragement of her maternal grandfather. At the age of twelve Juana was invited to join the viceregal court where she engaged in acts of reading and writing by becoming, first and foremost, a poet scholar. Sor Juana's years in the court could be argued to be her formative years, since during this time she develops a strong social network with 'worldly' people. The viceregal court allowed her to grow as a writer because she had open access to scholars and libraries. Most importantly, being at the court granted Juana the incredible opportunity to forge meaningful relationships with people in power, specifically the representatives of the Spanish crown. One of the most intriguing decisions Sor Juana made occurred in 1667, when she abruptly left the court to become a nun. She joined the San Carmelite Convent and adopted the name Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. After spending three months with this Order, Sor Juana left and entered the San Jerónimo Convent of Santa Paula in Mexico City, where she spent the rest of her life. At the San Jerónimo Convent, Sor Juana developed most of her literary repertoire which included a range of lyrical poetry, *loas*, *autosacramentales* (religious plays), *comedias* (three-act plays), theological discourses, and an epistolary collection, among other forms of writing. Sor Juana was admired for her intelligence, beauty, and unapologetic resistance towards the patriarchy and heteronormativity of *la Nueva España* [New Spain], modern day Mexico. Her knowledge and talent with words fascinated renowned scholars, like her friend Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and two couples of *la Nueva España* viceroys, who became her patrons and intimate friends. Moreover, through the royal court sponsorship, Sor Juana witnessed the publication of her work, albeit in Spain, which circulated throughout the empire.

Today, Sor Juana scholars, feminists, activists, women, artists, and readers, remember her prolific poetry. This includes her critique of men, *Hombres necios que acusais* [Stubborn Men] (~1680), a series of love poems written to *La Condesa* María Luisa de Paredes, *El primero sueño* [The First Dream] (1692), a lengthy, 975-verse philosophical poem, and *La respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* [The Response] (1692). Remembered as *la décima musa* [the Tenth Muse] and *La Fénix de México* [Mexico's Phoenix], Sor Juana penned works considered the literary peak of *el siglo de oro* [Spanish Golden Age] (late 15th to mid 17th centuries).¹ Sor Juana died in 1695 at the age forty-four during a black plague outbreak that engulfed all of Mexico City. At the time of her death, Sor Juana had already been forced to renounce her scholarly pursuits after the Catholic Church challenged her controversial arguments found in the *La Carta Atenagórica* [Athenagoric Letter].²

A Gathering of *Sorjuanistas*: Exploring the “Afterlives” of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

On 22-23 November 2019 a handful of *Sorjuanistas* gathered at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to celebrate the 350th anniversary of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's scholarly career.³

¹ In this paper I will use the terms ‘*siglo de oro*’ and ‘early modern period’ to refer to the literary period Sor Juana was a part of. Note, however, that the uses of ‘early modern period,’ *siglo de oro* [Golden Age], and ‘Spain’ is debated among scholars who study Hispanic literature and history. Thus, the varying terminology may prove confusing. Confusion is more likely to occur when these terms are used interchangeably or when the author is more restrictive with their terminology. For clarity in this debate, refer to Henry Kamen's *Golden Age Spain*. Kamen provides a concise explanation of the terms “Golden Age” and “Spain.” The term “Golden Age” does not encompass all aspects of the Spanish Empire's situation during the mid 15th century to early 17th century— and that is because the term “golden” is only associated with the good aspects of history during this era, while the bad aspects are not considered “golden” (Kamen 2). Kamen suggests that scholars often associate the Spanish “Golden Age” with the Catholic Monarchs, others with the Enlightenment, cultural success of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or the successful gold acquisition during the colonial period (Kamen 2). These different categories suggest that this Spanish era is not clearly defined; according to some scholars the start and end of the “Golden Age” only existed during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella while some consider the “golden” years to be limited to the Enlightenment period when writers, artists, and technology flourished. A term that has a somewhat neutral stance on this matter is “Early Modern Period”. This term includes the reign of the Catholic monarchs, the Enlightenment, ages of succession, and colonialism (gold acquisitions of the New World). Some may also see the term Baroque because Sor Juana is recognized as the last writer of this literary period.

² Scholars who wish to familiarize themselves with the Sor Juana's work should reference *Obras completas*, ed. Francisco Monterde (México, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, 2013).

³ Sor Juana's birthdate is a contested topic. Her archive, as much of her life, is an enigma; thus, when scholars study this material there is undoubtedly always a bit of distortion that is inevitable. Moreover, I would also like to note my use of the term *Sorjuanista/s*. This is not my word, but the way in which I employ it is original. I have chosen to think about *Sorjuanistas* as an ‘academic faction.’ This will allow us to consider *Sorjuanistas* as a new academic movement that is in continuous

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, professor of Chicana/o studies, English, and gender studies at UCLA, organized the two-day symposium: “*You Imagine Me and I Exist*”: *The Afterlives of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. This symposium featured lectures by leading *Sorjuanistas* like Emilie Bergmann, Emma Pérez, Amanda Powell, and Sara Poor Herrera, among others. The symposium was also a segue into Carla Lucero and Gaspar de Alba’s world premiere of *Juana: An Opera in Two Acts* (2019), a work adapted from Gaspar de Alba’s novel *Sor Juana’s Second Dream* (1999).⁴ Through Gaspar de Alba’s creative work and the work of other scholar-artists, I have been able to develop my own academic project. As a performance studies scholar currently researching the dramatic works of Sor Juana, I could not have found a more suitable event to inspire and inform my own research about Sor Juana reimaginings than the UCLA gathering. Even though this project analyzes dramatic works, I must confess that I had not seen any of them performed live, that is until the premiere of *Juana* in November. Gaspar de Alba’s seventeen-year-long project tells the story of a cloistered, lesbian Sor Juana who is deeply in love with *la Condesa*, [The Countess María Luisa de Paredes also known as Lysis by Sor Juana] (1621-1687). The opera’s angle and interpretation of Sor Juana is modern and unique, but it remains faithful to historical events of Sor Juana’s life, albeit embellished in certain instances for dramatic effect. This reimagined version of Sor Juana is queer, and she has a love affair with María Luisa de Paredes. The other playwrights who form part of my study, however, have chosen not to queer Sor Juana. They, too, nevertheless, take creative liberties that reframe Sor Juana’s historical narrative. All of these

development and is, thus, broken up into factions. Regardless of the way in which I divide and classify *Sorjuanistas*, it is important to note that the primary focus is Sor Juana’s literary archive and memory. Each faction, however, decides new approaches about how to study and preserve the memory of Sor Juana. I am most interested in *Sorjuanistas* who embrace the power of performance art to recreate and reshape Sor Juana in the 21st century.

⁴ See Gaspar de Alba’s novel, *Second Dream*, is similar to the opera itself. Although the character of “Alma” is [Sor Juana’s soul] is not developed in the same vein, I would argue that it is in fact absent from the novel. Another novel about Sor Juana that should be consulted is Paul Anderson’s *Hunger’s Bride*. This particular story is not strictly focused on Sor Juana’s story nor is it restricted to the colonial time period. It is, nevertheless, a relevant novel worthy of consideration because Anderson has created a modern-day version of Sor Juana that lives on. Thus, I will argue, that we now have multiple Sor Juanas. Note, that la primera *Sorjuanista*, Dorothy Schons, was working on a novel that narrated the “complete” history of Sor Juana. I will say more about this novelized version of Sor Juana in what follows.

playwrights develop a unique dramatic work which is sourced from the same archival material. The interpretation of the archive is different, and I will demonstrate that the playwrights' personal outlooks on life influence their own interpretations of Sor Juana's narrative. The *Sorjuanista's* reimagination of Sor Juana shapes the way in which they understand this literary figure's life and how they ultimately end up creating artistic work that presents a Sor Juana that aligns well with their own outlook of life. Thus, the character and history that spectators witness on stage is not the historical Sor Juana that one finds in the archive, but rather a fragment, or imagination, if you will, that has been embodied in efforts to expand our own perspective of this figure.

My presence at this symposium was purposeful as I sought to become one of the modern-day *Sorjuanistas*. At this conference a younger group of scholars set up a conversation about Sor Juana's significance, stemming from the work of the older generations. The younger group explored the dramatic works recreating Sor Juana's historical importance and maintaining her memory and legacy. Younger *Sorjuanistas* bring into focus the physical body of Sor Juana as a way to prove and challenge social norms and the classical narrative of Sor Juana. Through the living flesh and the physical performance of the body, scholar-artists add a new dimension to the literary figure's narrative. This transformation is because performing Sor Juana, much like any performance, has the potential to influence a spectator's perspective of the world. Performance Studies scholar, Diana Taylor, writes that performance allows us to see, to experience, and theorize its complex relation to systems of power.⁵ Thus, witnessing Sor Juana on stage creates effects and affects that influence the way in which we construct her reality. Moreover, creating contemporary reimaginings of Sor Juana's life re-appropriates her reality. When staged, this re-appropriation reflects the details of our own time period, our conception of the 'real,' and our idea of history. In this sense, performance becomes "a way of

⁵ Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

knowing,” or, as stated by Taylor, an episteme.⁶ To explore this further, I suggest that we consider the body as an archive and evaluate how the idea of heritage performances can relate to the history making that happens on stage when Sor Juana’s narrative is reimagined.

In *The Sentient Archive* (2018), Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland argue that the body draws from its own memories and experiences to create a repository of knowledge which influences how we interpret our lived experience, our state of being and creation, and retrieval of memory(ies).⁷ Thus, the embodied performances creates the ‘real’ that I mentioned above since, as argued by Bissell and Haviland, the body can be classified as a “cognitive system” that creates memory. This understanding of the body, paired with Laurajane Smith’s notions of embodied performance and the idea of heritage performance, allows us to challenge the way in which history is created. Thus, the performance of bodies is a way of knowing and creating. Smith goes on to argue that the body can “serve as a mnemonic practice that facilitates the transmission and communication of individual and social/collective memory.”⁸ In turn, this embodied performance is a means of “history making done outside the confines of formal historical disciplines” which allows heritage performances to trigger emotional responses to the past. Triggering emotions allows historical actors to obtain intellectual, emotional, and political agency in an effort to affirm and remember particular contemporary and future commitments to fighting social injustices.⁹

If we return to the focus of the younger *Sorjuanistas*’ research, we can see that it goes beyond Sor Juana’s literature and instead capitalizes on the scholarship produced about Sor Juana to create an alternative narrative or memory of the colonial era through her embodiment. It is important to note

⁶ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

⁷ Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland, eds., *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), xv.

⁸ Laurajane Smith, “The Embodied Performance of Museum Visiting: Sacred Temples or Theaters of Memory?,” in *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory*, ed. Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 129.

⁹ Smith, 139.

that the scholarship of previous generations focuses primarily on analyzing Sor Juana's poetry, *comedias*, *Respuesta*, and *Carta Atenagórica* to construct what I consider sources for the classical narrative.¹⁰ These three works have dominated the direction of the Sor Juana scholarship and the general perspective that scholar-artists take. These classical sources have informed the scholarship and validated the authenticity of the classical narrative's own history making.

The new reimaginings challenge the classical narrative of Sor Juana and instead create new memories that retell her story. These new dramatic works expand the perspectives and experiences of the historical Sor Juana. To shed light on the distinction between the alternative of these reimaginings, we must turn to the scholarship of the younger *Sorjuanistas* which is much more centered in developing an understanding of Sor Juana's life within the convent through the lens of performance. Thus, it is our task as young scholars to make sense of the work previous Sor Juana scholars introduced. We must consider how the dramatic work *Sorjuanistas* create shapes the understanding that we have of her. A number of dramatic works that have been produced about Sor Juana, but rather than provide an exhaustive list, I have selected a handful of them to demonstrate how Sor Juana's memory is preserved and reworked for modern audiences. Moreover, I aim to demonstrate that performing Sor Juana on stage allows audiences to develop an understanding of Sor Juana's own period. I look specifically at how institutions in power undermined women's role in society and how the existence or plausibility of finding loopholes allowed Sor Juana to resist subjugation. To understand Sor Juana's resistance, we must turn to her archive and see how scholars interpret it, but more importantly how it is being reimagined through the use of performance. The question that has remained unanswered is why there is a necessity, and I would go as far as calling this an obsession, to create new performance of Sor Juana in the United States. What is it about Sor Juana's

¹⁰ The work of this new group of scholars, much like my own, is rooted in work that, of course, makes reference to *la décima musa* but that is, nevertheless, a new body of work. Scholars have acknowledged that Sor Juana has undergone a metamorphosis and in recent years we can now recognize several modern day Sor Juanas.

story that is so appealing? More specifically, why develop a new script instead of simply readapting the earlier plays about Sor Juana? Performance is an ephemeral practice and every reperformance is unique because it is different than the first. Thus, why create multiple works about Sor Juana rather than simply using one as the source of entertainment and reimagination that challenges the classical narrative?

With each performance the classical narrative takes a new form because performance can intervene in society. As Taylor describes, performance is a process, enactment, exertion, intervention, and expenditure which allows spectators their own capacity for transformation.¹¹ Thus, what is found within the archive, has and can be been distorted. To clarify, the word distorted need not be negative because it provides an accurate description of what we are doing with Sor Juana's memory and how we reinvent her archive. We must distort the archival material in order to retell a different story, a story that is unique and that reflects other parts of Sor Juana which early scholars refused to acknowledge.

The reimaginings of Sor Juana that I study result in the development of alternative narratives and new repertoires of performance that challenge the classical narrative that we know of Sor Juana. Thus, contemporary works of performance about Sor Juana distort her story as a means to illuminate. In fact, most dramatic interpretations of Sor Juana, although seemingly uniform, have been distorted in one way or another. The act of distortion can be conscious or subconscious, but the process of reframing history and how one reimagines this literary figure in today's society is ultimately the same. What is different about the use of performance as a medium to reimagine Sor Juana is that the intentions that warrant a reimagination are more transparent. The scholar-artists who engage in modern day reimaginings of Sor Juana allow us to reframe the way in which we perceive her today.

¹¹ Taylor, *Performance*; Diana Taylor, "Scenes of Cognition: Performance and Conquest," *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 3 (September 28, 2004): 353–72, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2004.0129>.

The process of reimagining Sor Juana is in and of itself a form of embodied expression which re-appropriates the archive and allows us to develop a repertoire of performance that challenges the history of Sor Juana. Through performance, *Sorjuanistas* distort the classical narrative and this distortion proves essential in developing new perspectives and ideas.

This young group of scholars has argued that to recreate the narrative of Sor Juana, we inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, create multiple versions of her. Scholars continue to recreate Sor Juana, and the process of recreating her is also the process of resurrecting *la fénix de México* [the phoenix of Mexico]. These resurrections, however, are by no means consistent nor do they create a pure essence or authentic version of Sor Juana which aspire to cohesive and historically authentic narratives. We all understand that Sor Juana is, quite literally, dead. Nonetheless, it is productive to recreate her life in the San Jeronimo Convent and introduce her story to the world. Although scholars ultimately create a distorted version of Sor Juana, we are giving her a body and rewriting a history that consequently reframes the historical archive.

Reframing the Historical Archive and Retelling History

The recreations of Sor Juana are rooted in the same vein of memory-making developed by *la primera Sorjuanista*, Dorothy Schons, during the mid-twentieth century. The act of reinterpreting the archive through performance, as posited by Taylor, “transmit[s] knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices.”¹² Thus, contemporary performances about Sor Juana reflect the social experiences of individuals who are the receivers of such transmitted knowledge. The question that remains then is who are these individuals and why do they identify with Sor Juana? The answer lies in the fact that Sor Juana’s life experiences overlap with those of marginalized individuals in today’s society. Thus, scholars, artists, and scholar-artists are pursuing projects that create

¹² Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), xvi.

imaginings and reimaginings of the *décima musa* and through this work we can also think critically about Sor Juana's legacy and identify a new lineage of Sor Juanas who will pave a path for women, feminists, activists, playwrights, scholars, and more. This new group of *Sorjuanistas* takes interdisciplinary approaches that reveal what Gaspar de Alba calls the "afterlives" of Sor Juana. During the UCLA symposium, Gaspar de Alba, encouraged all the *Sorjuanistas* in the room to "look under Sor Juana's habit" in order to become acquainted with the most intimate parts of Sor Juana's seventeenth-century body and mind. For example, Charlene Villaseñor Black, whose research focuses on the art of the Ibero-American world, and Cesar Favila, whose work addresses "the musical lives of nuns" and the ideas of sacred music and its intersections with urban culture, gender, race, mysticism, and other fine arts of colonial Mexico, spoke about the way in which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries imagined Sor Juana. Villaseñor Black and Favila "uncovered" secrets of Sor Juana through the analysis of artists who produced works that remind us of and commemorate her.

The members of the ComuArte group present at the UCLA symposium form part of the new generation of *Sorjuanistas* because they, too, have come to recognize their 'inner Sor Juana.' This group has chosen to compose and arrange music evoking the memory of Sor Juana, and although this particular medium resonates differently, Sor Juana lives on through the people who remember and embody her. Thus, the transmission of Sor Juana's memory through music, as in the case of ComuArte members, but also through performance art, as with the scholar-artists whose work I analyze in the subsequent section, demonstrates the value in reperforming Sor Juana's narrative. Although this project will not analyze musical compositions, I mention the new generation of *Sorjuanistas* because this group represents the contemporary movement's creative range; in other words, these musical scores are yet another medium reimagining Sor Juana. One of the differences in interpreting Sor Juana through performance art, however, has to do with how her historical archive is brought to life. Performance art mobilizes her archive and embodies Sor Juana's memory. Contemporary Sor Juana

scholar-artists have given a breath of life to this static archive, and the UCLA event was full of refreshing perspectives and insightful references to previously published work. Moreover, this event was important for me because it was the first time I witnessed the commitment scholars have towards this iconic colonial Mexican literary figure.

Reimagining la Décima Musa

In particular, I am concerned with how each playwright has chosen to weave and reinterpret well known events marking Sor Juana's life. Understanding the chronology of the plays is not essential because each dramatic work is different. Thus, what proves much more important is knowing how Sor Juana's character develops in relation to those events and the characters that interact with her. As mentioned above, each reimagination is unique, but they all include key events of Sor Juana's life. Thus, theatrical works of *la décima musa* present her as a woman engaged in the act of writing. This portrayal emphasizes Sor Juana's position as a scholar and writer. These dramatic works make explicit reference to Sor Juana's examination administered by forty male scholars when she was just fourteen years old. The scenes, sometimes introduced as flashbacks, emphasize Sor Juana's desire to be a scholar and her position as a defiant woman engaged in acts of writing, reading, and critical thinking. In particular, one learns about the impact of *la famosa Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* [The Response], which she wrote six months after the controversial publication of *La Carta Atenagórica* [Athenagoric Letter] published secretly by the bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz in 1690, and her death which can be seen as literal and symbolic.¹³ For instance, the literal death is obvious to spectators because they see Sor Juana die on stage as she takes her last breath. The symbolic death is not as clear

¹³*La Respuesta* is one of Sor Juana's most recognized and studied works; it is considered her autobiography. Scholars argue that *La Respuesta* is a proto-feminist piece that advocates for women's education. Moreover, the context in which it was written and to whom it was targeted garners great attention from scholars. *La Carta Atenagórica* is a theological discourse, originally titled *Crisis de un sermón*, written by Sor Juana that was "never" meant to be published. Sor Juana shared some of her thoughts and criticisms regarding Portuguese theologian Antonio Vieira's sermon on las "finezas de amor de Cristo hacia los hombres."

because she does not actually die. Rather, what spectators see on stage is a Sor Juana renouncing her desire to be a scholar. These works assume that Sor Juana stopped writing in 1694, the year in which she writes a profession of faith and signs her name in blood. The symbolic nature of having this event is the scene of a young girl adopting Sor Juana's scholarly inclinations. Thus, as the scholarly Sor Juana "dies" yet another generation "is born", and the legacy of the *Fénix* lives on.

The intention to reframe the lens through which we view and analyze the archival material and the methods scholar-artists use to produce performance art is an effort meant to challenge previous narratives about Sor Juana. By reframing the lens, scholar-artists shape the way contemporary audiences remember this historical figure's resistance to various forms of discrimination that occurred during the colonial era. It also shows how those systems of oppression are still in existence in our modern world. Who Sor Juana *was* is a constant debate because the archival material is incomplete. Thus, Sor Juana, much like the work she produced, along with the scholarship about her, is often conceived of as incomplete. It has become popular to think about Sor Juana as an enigma and understanding her is a puzzle that will remain unsolved. Although each dramatic interpretation varies, they are, nevertheless, authentic versions of Sor Juana's life because each performance reflects *what we know* about her life. The way her history is presented, or *how we come to know these facts*, however, is what the performances push back on. To demonstrate this point further, I suggest that we turn, once again, to Taylor. In "Scenes of Cognition: Performance and Conquest" (2004), Taylor writes:

Any theoretical lens, as we know from past experience, can occlude as much as it reveals. Much of my previous work has looked at issues of representation, misrepresentation, and disappearance in contemporary Latin American theatre and performance. In this essay— part introduction to sixteenth-century Amerindian performance and part polemic— I think about the ways in which these pre-Conquest practices trouble some basic givens about the terms "theatre" and "performance" and ask us, not necessarily to replace them, but to rethink them again, from yet one more perspective.... The formulaic framework of these scenes of cognition makes us question claims to knowledge based on supposedly embodied participation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Taylor, "Scenes of Cognition," 354.

Thus, rather than simply allowing the past, current, and future scholarship about Sor Juana to solidify how we interpret her narrative, the scholar-artists whose work I study actively push for a continued reframing of the facts. Before going any further, I wish to speak about the process of creating an imagined version of Sor Juana and how each version is unquestionably rooted in an historical archive. Moreover, the use of the archive has informed each dramatic reimagination and provided artists the foundation to develop the narrative of Sor Juana. The use of the historical archive combined with the creativity of the artists who have chosen to produce Sor Juana's story through performance art is significant because the stories, regardless of how original they may be, are nevertheless, faithful representations of Sor Juana. I, of course, must qualify what a 'faithful' representation is and is not. In essence, I suggest that a 'faithful' performance of Sor Juana includes events that she did, indeed, experience in her life. These events, however, do not need to follow any particular pattern to be classified as 'authentic.' Here, it is helpful, once, again, to return to Taylor:

Instead of evidence garnered from first-hand witnessing (part of the repertoire of embodied practices that generate, store, and transmit social memory that I have discussed in a recent book), archival sources provide the basis for this description. Archival memory, I argue, maintains a lasting core: records, documents, literary texts, archaeological remains, and bones that are supposedly resistant to change. The value, relevance, or meaning of the remains might change over time, as do the ways in which they are interpreted, and even embodied. Through tricks of the archive, the scene-as-seen gets reproduced and inserted, unabridged and unacknowledged edged, into written accounts. The how-we-know, then, seems based on assertions by unidentified witnesses and the highly suspect reworking of lost originals.¹⁵

Thus, through an historical figure's recreation, we create an imagination that reflects contemporary values. The authors, whose work I analyze, concern themselves with creating a Sor Juana relevant to the Latin@ and Chican@ experiences because Sor Juana is their role model and "patron" (as in "patron saint"). I argue that *Sorjuanistas* elevate Sor Juana's status because they conceive of her as a guide and advocate for marginalized scholars, women, queer identifying individuals, and more.

¹⁵ Taylor, 356.

Mobilizing and Reimagining Sor Juana on Stage

Part of Gaspar de Alba, work focuses on exploring how Sor Juana's sexuality is interpreted on and off stage. Gaspar de Alba reimagines Sor Juana as a queer woman for various reasons visible in the archive. For instance, Sor Juana dedicates her major poetry collection to her patron and friend *la Condesa de Paredes*, or Lysis. Another reason why Gaspar de Alba created a queer Sor Juana is that she identifies with her as a literary figure. I do not intend to argue whether Sor Juana was or was not a queer woman, but rather, I wish to highlight the creative approaches on both sides of the sexuality debate promote and further develop how one creates an ideal and 'authentic' imagination of Sor Juana even if she is a queer character. In particular, I find the explicit portrayal of Sor Juana as a lesbian or queer woman on stage to be one of the most direct ways in which *Sorjuanistas* have challenged previous claims that Sor Juana *could not* have been a lesbian or queer woman at the time. The intimate and sexual relationship between Sor Juana and the Countess of Paredes provokes debate among *Sorjuanistas*; Octavio Paz, for instance, argues that a queer Sor Juana is an inaccurate historical reimagination. We must consider what is at stake when queering Sor Juana and what are the historical and social ramifications of making this choice. If, as I have mentioned above, the historical archive of Sor Juana is incomplete, how can one judge if the reimagination that is created is in fact inaccurate? I suggest that a queer Sor Juana forces scholars and theatrical audiences who bear witness to her reimagination to question the validity of the classical narrative of Sor Juana. I propose that scholars who queer Sor Juana do so in an attempt, at least in part, to create a plausible narrative that allows modern day scholars to understand the potential intimate experiences and emotions of their subject. Artists present these as alternate forms of memories. This framing of the story is effective in creating Sor Juana for theater audiences. Thus, the work produced about Sor Juana demonstrates the fluidity of the narrative and grants scholars an autonomy over how to create, or in several instances reimagine, the memory of Sor Juana.

Octavio Paz (1914-1998), renowned Mexican scholar, posited that Sor Juana's "Sapphic tendencies," although plausible, were most likely due to her close proximity to women and the cloistered nature of the convent.¹⁶ To Paz, Sor Juana was a "victim" of circumstance that may have led her to engage in "Sapphic tendencies." Paz argues that Sor Juana was not a lesbian woman nor could she ever be labeled as such because there is no evidence that can concretely affirm such a suggestion. Thus, the possibility of her "condition" can be nothing more than a speculation. By maintaining Sor Juana's heterosexuality, Paz "protected" Sor Juana from deviating from what he classified as the ideal national expectations. Thus, it is clear he truly believes he is "rescuing" her memory and preserving her work for future Mexican generations.

Paz's particular perspective has implications for future *Sorjuanistas* who believe that Sor Juana was a queer woman. After all, no one can claim to know or understand Sor Juana's sexuality. To understand the debates occurring among *Sorjuanistas*, I suggest that we consider Luis Felipe Fabre's creative description of the discrepancies in the Sor Juana scholarship. Fabre suggests that scholars, most of whom I classify as *Sorjuanista* fanatics, continually attempt to decipher, interpret, and re-interpret Sor Juana's life and her literary work. Fabre writes :

Todos los sorjuanistas discrepan en algo. Discrepan entre ellos. Discrepan/ en algo que suele ser casi todo. Por ejemplo:/ Las razones de Sor Juana para tomar los hábitos. Las razones de Sor Juana para escribir la Carta Atenagórica. Las razones de Sor Juana para su abjuración final... Y también en casi todo los demás, de lo cual es posible deducir/ que la tarea primordial de los sorjuanistas/ es la de discrepar de lo que dicen otros sorjuanistas.¹⁷

[All Sor Juana scholars differ on something. Differ/ among themselves. Differ/ on something, usually everything. For example:/ The reasons Sor Juana took the veil./ The reasons Sor Juana wrote the *Carta Atenagórica*./ The reasons Sor Juana finally recanted... And also about almost everything else,/ from which it is possible to deduce/ that the essential task of Sor Juana scholars/ is to differ with what other Sor Juana scholars say."] (Translation by John Pluecker)

Fabre's argument encompasses the field of Sor Juana and, more specifically, summarizes what occurs in the reimaginings of Sor Juana. Like other scholarly debates about Sor Juana, performance art is

¹⁶ Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz o Las trampas de la Fe*, 3. ed. Réimpr (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1985).

¹⁷ Luis Felipe Fabre, *Sor Juana and Other Monsters*. (Place of publication not identified: Ugly Duckling Pr, 2015), 2-3.

part of the perpetual disagreement among *Sorjuanistas*. Today, there is no longer one Sor Juana; there are multiple versions. Yet, all versions share similarities and show Sor Juana pushing back against the male patriarchy and social heteronormativity of the colonial era which is still perpetuated in today's society. In the United States, and in other countries, Sor Juana has become part of the performance art market and of popular culture because her character's struggle resonates with audiences worldwide. Ilan Stavans's *Sor Juana or the Persistence of Pop* (2018) and Emily Hind's "Contemporary Mexican Sor Juanas: Artistic, Popular, and Scholarly" (2017) explore Sor Juana's position and development within twenty-first century popular culture. Stavans and Hind argue, though with slightly different goals in mind, that Sor Juana has been transformed into an iconic figure because her story educates individuals on how to push back against oppressive powers. Thus, Sor Juana's memory models behavior that allows marginalized groups to emerge from the sidelines. Her story has become accessible through several mediums such as multimedia platforms, films, a television series, novels, dramatic works, and children's literature, among other artistic sources.¹⁸ Generally, these outlets depict Sor Juana as she was, that is, as a nun within the San Jerónimo Convent. Within this space, Sor Juana develops a conspicuous erudition that posed a threat to institutional powers that overawe both the public and private spheres of the era. These institutional powers included the Church, particularly the Spanish Inquisition, and Sor Juana's male companions, such as her confessor el Padre Antonio de Miranda.

The appeal of Sor Juana cannot be pinpointed, but the scholars who study her and the scholar-artists who draw on theatre and performance to give her a physical body showcasing a "complete" narrative of Sor Juana's convent life venerate her. However, what does performance do to her story and why does this medium matter? Or more specifically, how does performance art about Sor Juana

¹⁸ Popular culture works include: *Yo, la peor de todas* (1990) film by María Luisa Bemberg, *Hunger's Bride: A novel of the Baroque* (2005) a novel by Paul Anderson, *Juana Inés* (2007) children's book by Georgina Lázaro León, the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Heresy of Love* (2012) by Helen Edmunds, *Conoce a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (2017) children's book by Edna Iturralde, among others.

distinguish itself from other kinds of art that also seek to reimagine her? To answer these questions, I suggest we turn to theatre and performance studies. Diana Taylor writes, “theatricality is the optic associated with theatre,” and I would argue that it is not simply an adjective of theatre (a “theatrical delivery”) or a metaphor (“as if it were a stage”), but a way of seeing the constructed nature of the real.¹⁹ Thus, in our creations of Sor Juana we create dramatic work that can be used for entertainment. In the process we also create an alternate reality (or “history”) that develops new sources of inclusivity by reframing the historical facts and allowing audiences to view and interpret such facts with a new lens that either complements, rejects, or produces a new idea of what is and is not history.

Previous scholarship has often used Sor Juana’s written work as source material to tell her narrative; however, I propose that we look at new source material in order to create a modern narrative of Sor Juana. I suggest that we accept that the historical Sor Juana who lived during the colonial period is gone. She is physically gone and thus requires a new body or bodies that can continue to animate her for today’s society. Moreover, her memory, as noted by some scholars such as Luis Felipe Fabre, has been distorted, and as a result, it is challenging for anyone to agree on one narrative. Thus, Fabre, who believes Sor Juana has become a new creature has categorized her as a “monstruo” [monster]. This metaphor need not be interpreted as negative because it permits us to remember that Sor Juana is *La Fénix de México* [Phoenix of Mexico] an actual creature or perhaps more accurately, a mythological monster. Moreover, Fabre’s reference to Sor Juana as a “monstruo” is consistent with the interpretation Dorothy Schons, *la primera Sorjuanista*, posits stating, “[Sor Juana] was a curiosity, a veritable *monstruo de la naturaleza*, and must have been the object of persistent and in many cases unwelcome attention.”²⁰ Thus, this idea of Sor Juana as a distorted figure demonstrates the way in which scholars have continued to struggle with creating versions of Sor Juana. At the same time,

¹⁹ Taylor, “Scenes of Cognition.”

²⁰ Dorothy Schons, “Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz,” *Modern Philology* 24, no. 2 (November 1, 1926): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1086/387633>.

however, it shows scholars that Sor Juana's memory has an inherent nature of distortion that is meant to be enigmatic. Sor Juana cannot be understood today because she was not understood during the colonial era.

Through my own research, I have found that scholars often ground their work in Sor Juana's *Respuesta*, as it is classified as an autographical literary piece. They then pull from Sor Juana's poetry to find "intimate moments" that reveal her emotions, potentially exposing her true essence. These scholarly approaches find their way into a playwrights' creative processes and the products are multiple reimaginings of Sor Juana. They are reimaginings because each dramatic work I analyze is simply another interpretation of Sor Juana's life through a reframed lens. The playwrights' angles are original, and thus, each reinterpretation is different from the first. However, the goal of the reimagination is ultimately the same because the physical embodiment of Sor Juana resonates with spectators as they receive remnant fragments of her memory. This memory may be classified and distorted, but nevertheless, it empowers audiences to act, and in some cases, react, against the marginalization, oppression, and/or subtle and passive forms of discrimination ingrained in society. By giving Sor Juana a complete narrative and allowing for another body (that of the performer) to become Sor Juana, theatre sets Sor Juana in physical "motion" for contemporary audiences. It is through this physical mobilization of Sor Juana that we can understand the playwright's ultimate goal. Mobilizing Sor Juana on stage, which is in and of itself a platform, allows Sor Juana to empower individual audience members. Thus, Sor Juana's mobilization through theater can be classified as a form of memory-making that transforms audiences in different and powerful ways. In viewing a reimagination of Sor Juana, we gain a new perspective that shifts how we feel and think about the world and ourselves. As a consequence, spectators might respond to the embodied performance and mobilize themselves outside of the theatre. To qualify this even further, Latin@ and Chican@ spectators react to the embodied performance of Sor Juana and learn to resist systems of oppression that seek to subject

them in the US. Sor Juana becomes a role model and her followers become her devotees because she can teach them ways of resistance, and most importantly, Sor Juana's reimaginings exposes what this group is challenging—sexism, xenophobia, and racism.

In *Sor Juana* (1989), Estella Portillo-Trambley reimagines a Sor Juana in love with her confessor and whose friendship with the Vicreine of New Spain pollutes and blinds her vision of the new world. Moreover, Sor Juana antagonizes the members of the court while she romanticizes Padre Antonio Núñez de Miranda and the institution of the Church. Thus, unlike most of the more contemporary *Sorjuanistas*, Portillo-Trambley chooses to create a memory of Sor Juana that deals explicitly with emotional trauma and identity crisis. It is unclear to me whether Portillo-Trambley consulted Schons's works, but I assume that most, if not all, of the scholar-artists who reimagine Sor Juana are well versed in the sources about her life. After all, the academic work *Sorjuanistas* established has paved the road so that many scholar-artists can use it to garner credibility for their own interpretations of Sor Juana. That is, the dramatic works created for the stage complement the academic work produced about Sor Juana. All these components are pieces of the puzzle that scholars use to develop Sor Juana's narrative. Thus, when analyzing Portillo-Trambley's work, I cannot help but notice how this dramatic work complements Schons's 1926 essay. There are overlapping themes covered in this dramatic work regarding Sor Juana's renunciation of fame which Schons explores but which is best presented on stage.

In *The Sins of Sor Juana* (2001), Karen Zacarías presents the life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by adopting some of her stylistic choices, particularly those found in *Los empeños de una casa*, a *comedia* written in 1683 and published in 1692 that is part of the anthology, *Segundo volumen*, of Sor Juana's work. Like Sor Juana, Zacarías writes a *comedia de enredos* (comedy of "entanglement") in which a man courts a woman, there are different plot lines, and a death. In this story, audiences witness Sor Juana become *enredada* (tangled) in a conflict while she is living in the Convent of San Jerónimo. From the

outset, audiences learn that Sor Juana is “different.” Unlike the other cloistered nuns, Sor Juana is invested in writing, and this desire gets her into trouble. However, as the play continues, we learn that there is more. It is the details that follow that show Zacarías’s intervention in Sor Juana’s story. To Zacarías, Sor Juana was both a writer and a woman whose inner desires were multifaceted. These desires cannot be completely understood through Sor Juana’s own writings, so the play willfully distorts the nun’s historical image. The stories that originate from Zacarías’s reimaginings create an *enredo* (or confusion). My argument for this chapter will cover three topics. First, I will analyze the intimate relationships found among Sor Juana, the court and the church. I will then analyze the relationship between Sor Juana and Xochitl because she is an Aztec woman whose character foils Sor Juana’s. Both these women are exoticized, Sor Juana for her mind and Xochitl for her being a native woman. Unlike Sor Juana, however, Xochitl experiences racism. Finally, I will conclude by analyzing the structure of this play. I argue that the plot exposes the limits of reimaginings and perspectives that scholar-artists who are invested in recreating the history of Sor Juana conceive. The *comedia de enredos* structure is what causes audiences to become *enredados* with Sor Juana.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba has a long-standing relationship with Sor Juana. In 1999, Gaspar de Alba wrote *Sor Juana’s Second Dream*. This novel, several years in the making, encapsulates the image that Gaspar de Alba has of Sor Juana. To Gaspar de Alba, Sor Juana was a prodigy, poet, scholar, and proto feminist. *Sorjuanistas* contend that these descriptions are true. However, the author takes creative liberties going further to include interpretations of Sor Juana’s life that are highly debated and controversial among the various *Sorjuanista* communities. Although I will not be analyzing the novel in this chapter, I have chosen to share the work with you because Gaspar de Alba has re-appropriated her work several times.

Forging my argument at the convergence of literary, performance, and religious studies, I suggest that these four theatrical works offer a means of uncovering elements of history not accessible

through an archive. Specifically, I trace Sor Juana’s “reincarnation” within these dramatic works and argue that the artists strategically reimagine their icon’s memory. Through theater, the resurrected Sor Juana adapts to and negotiates with power in real time, bridging past and present structures of oppression to show their persistence over time. I argue that Sor Juana’s presence within American theater has made her a quintessential figure of social progress, particularly for Chicana and Latina individuals. These reimagined narratives highlight some of Sor Juana’s greatest challenges during the colonial era. Through my research, I will demonstrate that the purpose of reimagining *la décima musa* is a project meant to empower and inform oppressed individuals. Rather than presenting a subjugated Sor Juana who is ultimately defeated, authors remember a woman who sacrifices her greatest desire. Through this sacrifice, Sor Juana cements her legacy, because another woman is given the opportunity to engage in the acts of reading and writing. In Zacarías’s play and Gaspar de Alba’s opera we see a young girl take on Sor Juana’s desires. Dramatizing Sor Juana’s end is significant because she lives on through other characters. Thus, it is not an outrageous claim to say she does the same in the real world.

I suggest that we look at these dramatic works as hagiographies because Sor Juana takes on the elevated status granted to patron saints.²¹ Though Sor Juana is not a saint nor is she ‘sanctified’ in any way, Sor Juana is, nevertheless, a patron of sorts because she is a revered trailblazer of early modern female literacy and education, as well as an iconic figure of feminist, gender, and sexuality studies. My goal in researching Sor Juana’s career is to demonstrate that these “random” theatrical interpretations can be brought into conversation with each other because they represent a devotional literature. In particular, I am interested in the academic community’s devotion towards Sor Juana and the multiple dramatic works that resurrect this figure for modern generations.

²¹ See also, Margo Glantz, *Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz: Hagiografía o Autobiografía?* (Mexico, D.F: Grijalbo: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995).

La Primera Sorjuanista

Dorothy Schons (1898-1961) was an American professor of Spanish at the University of Texas at Austin. Schons pioneered biographical scholarship about Sor Juana and is recognized as *la primera Sorjuanista*. Moreover, Schons's work expanded the field of Sor Juana because it placed in conversation contemporary books and manuscripts written about Sor Juana with the archival material in the attempt to build a complete biographical picture of the seventeenth century nun. Thus, Schons sought to settle some of the biggest questions that all major biographies (and the dramatic works that form part of this study) about Sor Juana attempt to grapple with— Why did Sor Juana choose to enter a convent? Why did Juana, when reaching the apogee of fame, renounce it?

In this section, I focus my attention on Schons's "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" (1926). I argue that Schons's essay forms the foundation of Portillo-Trambley's dramatic play and becomes appropriated and distorted, perhaps unknowingly, by Gaspar de Alba and Zacarías. In her essay, Schons describes the social conditions of Sor Juan's life during the colonial era. These speculations are mapped onto the dramatic works that I analyze. Schons writes, "[a] careful study of contemporary writers shows that moral conditions in Mexico were very bad... the male element of the population was not under restraint (even the priesthood was no exception) and roamed at will, preying on society."²² Schons's view of colonial society is "pessimistic" because it privileges men. When one turns to Sor Juana, she clearly developed a strong character that challenged the social system that relegated her to the periphery of social and scholarly life. This detail in Schons's work is important because it acknowledges that Sor Juana was strategic in making the decisions that she made during her lifetime. Even though Sor Juana was able to achieve great recognition during her time in a convent, it is important to note, as Schons has explained, that the church created convents to control women and keep them under formal scrutiny. So why would Sor Juana choose a life in the convent?

²² Schons, "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz," 143.

The answer to this question can be found in her famous *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* [Response to Sor Filotea de la Cruz]. The first *Sorjuanista* analyzed the *Respuesta* and concluded that Sor Juana retired to the convent because she simply had no other option. Her choices were limited, but she was strategic and critical about her decision-making process. Schons explores basic questions and develops fundamental pieces for Sor Juana studies. Schons begins to write a historical novel entitled *Sor Juana: A Chronicle of Old Mexico*. Although mostly unedited, this source shows that Schons was creating a unique Sor Juana narrative. Schons remains true to the documented history of Sor Juana and creatively imagines a story that grants Sor Juana a voice allowing Schons to grant Sor Juana agency over the way her narrative is constructed. Schons liberates Sor Juana from the colonial oppression by retelling a story that restores agency to her historical figure. Schons creates a story, partly factual and partly fictional, that is, nevertheless, a commemoration of Sor Juana's life. Unfortunately, this work was never finished; the partially edited manuscripts now rest at the LILLAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collection with the rest of Schons's papers. Nevertheless, the work is crucial to our understanding of how Schons begins to conceptualize her ideal version of Sor Juana. Like the scholar-artists whose work I analyze, Schons engages in a creative process that reimagines Sor Juana for contemporary audiences. She uses her first chapter to explore Sor Juana's childhood, which is accurately gathered from Sor Juana's *Respuesta*, and re-appropriates the context to set the plot she has imagined for Sor Juana. This narrative, much like the dramatic works of this study, grants the character of Sor Juana agency which in turn produces a character that can empower readers. Note, however, that Schons is not creating the archival material, rather she uses the same sources that have been studied by previous scholars and reinterprets them to shed new light providing us with a distinct perspective regarding Sor Juana's life. To show case this, I suggest that we turn to the primary source itself.

In her *Respuesta*, Sor Juana provides specific details about her early childhood. She explains that she was a self-taught woman from an early age. Some scholars argue that making herself conspicuous at a very young age had great risks in store. Additionally, as noted by her “first biographer,” Jesuit Father Diego Calleja, “[Sor Juana] corría el riesgo de desgraciada por discreta y, con desgracia no menor, de perseguida por hermosura,” [Sor Juana ran the risk of being unhappy for being discreet, while also running the same risk for being beautiful].²³ Calleja’s quote is perhaps what prompted the debate regarding why Sor Juana joined the convent. Celsa Carmen García Valdés responds to Calleja’s statement, by writing “Así lo debieron de ver sus parientes que buscaron el modo de introducirla en el palacio virreinal en algún puesto acorde con su edad y class,” [That is perhaps how her family members saw her, as they sought to introduce her to the Viceroyal court for a job fitting for her age and class]. Essentially, Calleja, despite being a great admirer of Sor Juana, shows that the nun’s character was too conspicuous and dangerous. His argument makes Sor Juana appear as if her beauty would debilitate her social presence for the rest of her life. Her character would prove challenging during her lifetime because the social system would always work against her.

Therefore, the convent was a refuge where she could find some relief from the social pressure of her time. However, the additional part of the argument is most concerned with Sor Juana’s “hermosura” [beauty]. Dorothy Schons writes, “[s]ome of [Sor Juana’s] biographers believe that she must have [entered the convent] because of an unfortunate love affair. Schons disagrees with this perspective because she argues there is insufficient evidence to prove this contention is true. Additionally, Schons writes, “[t]he story is based on nothing more substantial than the fact that her works contain a large number of love lyrics.” Thus, Schons’s view regarding Sor Juana’s occasional poetry suggests that she did, indeed, incorporate, although subtly, love confessions to *la Condesa de*

²³ Celsa Carmen García Valdés, “Apunte Biográfico,” in *Los Empeños de Una Casa: Amor Es Más Laberinto*, ed. Celsa Carmen García Valdés, 1a. ed, Letras Hispánicas 652 (Madrid: Cátedra, 2010), 14.

Paredes. José Virgil also disagrees with the idea that Sor Juana joined the convent because of “un amor desgraciado” [unhappy love story]. Virgil goes one step further to grant Sor Juana agency over her decision by writing, “Yo veo en Sor Juan uno de esos espíritus superiores,... que son incapaces de sucumbir a debilidades vulgares” [I see in Sor Juana one of those superior spirits... that are incapable of succumbing to weak vulgarities]. Considering this, how does Schons’s scholarly work on Sor Juana help us navigate the modern-day literature that is newer and perhaps more relevant and complete? The conversations regarding Sor Juana’s sexuality have changed and broadened significantly, as can be seen in Gaspar de Alba’s work, nevertheless, Schons’s interpretations show the “lineage” of where these “radical” interpretations begun.

Schons first ‘met’ Sor Juana at the San Jerónimo Convent during a trip she took to Mexico. This visit was highly publicized and received great attention from many of Schons’s Mexican colleagues. Schons’s archive suggests that this visit was years in the making. Prior to her visit, Schons had corresponded extensively with Ermilio Abreu Gómez, Julio Torri, Artemio de Valle Arzipe, Manuel Broja, José de Jesús Núñez y Domínguez, and Gonzalo Obregón, among others. Years after, this event received external recognition from the Academia Mexicana in 1939, and Schons was promoted to Associate Professor. Yet, despite this recognition for her work, Schons was never promoted to full professor and was never granted tenure. This detail is intriguing because if we are to trace the parallels that exists between Sor Juana and Schons, it is productive to recognize the barriers that were systematically built around them. Clearly both Schons and Sor Juana had a passion for academic work and they received multiple accolades during their lifetime. Unfortunately, however, after having reached the apogee of their careers, both quickly lost hold of the fame and honors. This detail is interesting because when we turn to the dramatic works, although scholar-artists have a commitment to retelling Sor Juana’s story, this same group of individuals obsessively recreates the fall of their iconic figure. It is the process of reimagining Sor Juana’s downfall that is captivating to audiences because

the dramatic end, ironically, reinforces the power of her work. That is, Sor Juana and her literary aspirations posed a threat to leaders of the Catholic Church because her desires disrupted the status quo.

Schons's life has also been dramatized in 1998, by Mexican scholar Guillermo Schmidhuber who published *La Secreta Amistad de Juana y Dorotea: Obra de Teatro en Siete Escenas* in order to probe the relationship between these two figures. His work is significant because he commemorates the historic "encounter" between Sor Juana and Schons that occurred in 1928. In a different work, Schmidhuber returns to this story and explains that Schon's doctoral dissertation was not written on Sor Juana, but instead on a male writer from the early modern period, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (1581-1639).²⁴ Schmidhuber speculates that perhaps Schons was unable to choose to write about Sor Juana because her colleagues and dissertation committee did not value an investigation of a woman on another woman. Despite these setbacks, Schons's short bibliography on Sor Juana has been a great contribution to scholars.

²⁴ Schons, "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz," 143.

Part 2

'You Imagine Me... And I Exist'

“entre vuestras plumas ando, / no como soy, sino como / quisisteis imaginarlo”²⁵
[among your words I am / not how I *am*, but how / you have imagined me]
-Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1692?)

I begin this chapter with Sor Juana’s own words because she summarizes, in a very elegant and beautiful manner, what we have all done with her memory. Sor Juana exists in the minds of *Sorjuanistas*, and through performance, she can exist for everyone else. The works that form part of this chapter show a Sor Juana not how she was but how one individual(s) has decided to imagine her.

My analysis will consider how a hybrid space like the U.S. has complicated the way in which Latin@s and Chincan@s engage with their society.²⁶ In this section I will attempt to answer a few questions that shed light on what the embodiment of Sor Juana is “doing.” This section will consider how the fascination with Sor Juana continues to awe individuals, artists, and the academy. Is it her social context, her rebellious attitude, or her natural talent with words? (Or perhaps a combination of everything?) It is clear from the amalgam of plays that exists that Sor Juana’s story resonates with individuals living in the United States. Performing Sor Juana impacts the way in which her narratives reflect the social bumps we are still trying to overcome.

²⁵ From Sor Juana’s *Segundo Volumen* [Second Volume] (1692). Juana Inés de la Cruz, “*Ecos de mi pluma*”: *antología en prosa y verso*, ed. Martha Lilia Tenorio, Penguin clásicos (Ciudad de México: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2018). Translations are my own. Emphasis added in the second “am.”

²⁶ Sor Juana has been reimagined outside of the United States and through several different artistic mediums. Condensed list: Films on Sor Juana: *Yo, La Peor de Todas* (1990), *Constelaciones* (1980); Television series, accessible via Netflix: *Juana Inés* (2016); Literature: *Sor Juana’s Second Dream* (1999), *Hunger’s Bride* (2005); Children’s literature *A Library for Sor Juana: The World of Sor Juana* (2002), *Conoce a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (2017), see “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” in *Rejected Princesses*; Visual art pieces, “Los Secretos de Sor Juana” (2008), “The Voices of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” (2016); Theater, “Juana Inés de la Cruz: Poema Dramático” (1952), *The Heresy of Love* (2012).

Sor Juana as a Chican@

In Estella Portillo-Trambley's *Sor Juana* we are introduced to a *monja* (nun) who has complex emotions and human experiences. Sor Juana is confused and in pain. This rendition of *la décima musa* is perhaps one of the most emotional reimaginings because Sor Juana punishes herself, she renounces her greatest desires, forfeits her closest allies, and inflicts suffering on her family because of her own ignorance. Through the use of flashbacks, Portillo-Trambley gives audiences a story of Sor Juana that is about *la raza*. It is for Chican@s and what Octavio Paz classifies as *pachucos* (i.e. Mexican Americans).²⁷ This play is about identity and finding oneself amidst all the chaos that is part of our society. Portillo-Trambley shows us that Sor Juana's social and cultural norms led to her demise; that is not to say that Sor Juana is free of fault. In fact, Portillo-Trambley puts some blame on Sor Juana for breaking Padre Núñez's heart and for abandoning her Slave Juana and her close male friend Andres.

The play adopts cinematic storytelling through recurrent flashbacks that show the protagonist in different moments of her life. We also see an explicitly heterosexual Sor Juana who is in love with her confessor and who wants to be forgiven before she dies. The stakes are high because Sor Juana knows that she is going to pass and that her closest friends have already gone. Thus, her only savior, at the end of the play is God.

This version of Sor Juana is pious and confessional. Unlike the other iterations of the character that we will see, this reimagining focuses on exploring Sor Juana's religious life and how she lost her way, but eventually became enlightened. Thus, Sor Juana goes through a journey of discovery that also exposes who she is, but most importantly, at least for Portillo-Trambley, who Sor Juana is not. In particular, Portillo-Trambley presents the rift between Sor Juana and her *raza* community at the

²⁷ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp, 1. Evergreen publ, Evergreen Book 359 (New York, NY: Grove [u.a.], 1961).

forefront of the entire conflict. Sor Juana's ignorance of her culture and her unwillingness to side with the *nativos* revolting against the Spaniards is what contributes to her identity crisis. Sor Juana loses herself because she cannot reconcile who she is anymore. She is a *criolla* who has sworn her life to the Church and God, but she has also refused to give up her greatest desire, to be a writer. This desire drives Sor Juana further away from her culture because she becomes more of an *española*. The issue, however, is that Sor Juana's patrons, who are actual *españoles*, do not see her as one of them because she is not of pure Spanish blood. The issue of race purity is brought to the table because Sor Juana's duality as a *criolla* puts her at odds with those who claim only one racial, regional, and cultural identity. We can compare Sor Juana's situation with someone who is "X" American, for example. The duality creates issues for a person not because they themselves misunderstand who they are but because society's structure and how it classifies individuals contradicts someone with a complex identity.

Portillo-Trambley exposes the xenophobia of the colonial era. More importantly, she shows how xenophobia affects individuals forced to confront the contradictions of their identities. However, the system creates the conflicts that perpetuate racism and xenophobia and that force the individual to fit societal expectations. For clarification, I turn to Gaspar de Alba's concise critique of Octavio Paz's "The *Pachuco* and Other Extremes" (1961). Paz writes about the Mexican Americans as a corrupted race who are "contradictory, passive, disdainful, bellicose, suicidal, lost, isolated from the culture of their ancestral homeland."²⁸ To Paz, "the *pachuco* cannot adapt himself to a civilization which, for its part, rejects him."²⁹ Moreover, the *pachuco*'s condition is certainly due to his loss of "inheritance" which includes "languages, religion customs, and beliefs."³⁰ The *pachuco*'s inability to

²⁸ A critique of Octavio Paz's "The *Pachuco* and Other Extremes" in Alicia Gaspar de Alba, "Introduction to Dossier: Un Mariachi de Respuestas a La Décima Musa," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 44, no. 2 (2019): 135–48.

²⁹ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp, 1. Evergreen publ, Evergreen Book 359 (New York, NY: Grove [u.a.], 1961), 14.

³⁰ Paz, 15.

grapple with their own inheritance prevents them from entering North American society fully and forces them to “den[y] both the society from which he originated and that of North America.”³¹

Portillo-Trambley places blame on Sor Juana for her ignorance. By accepting the blame, Sor Juana acknowledges that she is not “pure,” and that she is a version of the *pachuco* Paz described. The playwright channels Sor Juana to demonstrate that the real culprit is society and not the individuals who were labelled *criollos* at the time of Sor Juana and *pachucos* during Paz’s lifetime. Consequently, Portillo-Trambley undermines Paz’s nationalism enterprise that sought to excommunicate Chican@s. This allows Chican@s to claim Sor Juana and to challenge Mexican nationalism and xenophobia.

When Sor Juana is re-enlightened and subsequently saved from condemnation, she exposes the fragility of the discriminating system. This is a fragment at the beginning of Portillo-Trambley’s play, where spectators witness a penitent Sor Juana who willingly gives herself to God. In a graphic opening scene, Sor Juana asks forgiveness from God and Jesus Christ as she physically chastises herself with a whip.

Sweet Jesus, Jesús del alma mía, me entrego a tu compañía. Peróndame mis pecados. Forgive my arrogance, my pride, my selfishness. Oh, Sweet Jesus, I have forsaken my vows. You, Who are all merciful, do not desert me in this, the hour of need. Let your angels surround me. My strength has left me. My mind has left me. I am empty. Oh Divine Spirit, fill this sorrowful vessel with your compassion. Dear Christ, my body shall feel your pain, your wounds... Oh Lamb of God! Cleanse my spirit. Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save. Blood of Christ, inebriate me.³²

It appears that Sor Juana has done something wrong, but the audience is still unaware of what has caused this particular reaction. Although her sin is unknown, her piety comes across quite clearly since she demonstrates an explicit commitment to God and her religious vows. This detail is significant because Portillo-Trambley focuses, primarily, on exploring the religiosity of Sor Juana. This particular detail adds a rich perspective to the conversations that seek to discuss whether Sor Juana was actually

³¹ Paz, 17.

³² Estela Portillo Trambley, *Sor Juana and Other Plays* (Ypsilanti, Mich: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1983), 145–46.

interested in religion when she decided to become a nun. This topic is one of the great enigmas, but rather than making presumptions, Portillo-Trambley explicitly shows us a religious Sor Juana. The absence of this characteristic does not necessarily mean that other *Sorjuanistas* doubt Sor Juana's piety. Gaspar de Alba's work is not as clear about Sor Juana's religiosity, but given the cover art of her novel, *Second Dream*, I would argue that her version of Sor Juana is also religious.³³ Sor Juana's religiosity is not explicit and is instead implied by the mere fact that Sor Juana is a nun. Moreover, we must not forget that Sor Juana chooses to retake her vows before renouncing her desire to write. Thus, I argue that Gaspar de Alba and Zacarías's Sor Juana values religion, but she does not engage with it as Portillo-Trambley's Sor Juana does.³⁴

To return to the matter at hand, what we see in Portillo-Trambley's play is a Sor Juana unable to reconcile her commitment to her vows with her desires to be a writer. Moreover, this dilemma has more challenging implications for Sor Juana because she "forgets" who she is. As Portillo-Trambley frames this narrative, audiences realize that Sor Juana loses a connection with her culture and heritage, in essence, what Chicano/a scholars would consider *la raza*. Thus, the issue becomes more about Sor Juana forgetting herself and the community she comes from than it is about her being a woman engaging in the acts of writing. That said, the issue remains political because *la raza* discriminates against women and having a racial duality only adds to the discrimination. Stavans argues that Sor Juana becomes even more 'handicapped' by her duality.

Portillo-Trambley antagonizes the Spaniards and the noble courts in the play. More specifically, what distinguishes this play from other works is that Padre Núñez is Sor Juana's lover, and he is the one who truly embraces and understands Sor Juana. Rather than giving Sor Juana a love

³³ I will return to this point in the pages that follow when I analyze Gaspar de Alba's work, but I will note here that the cover of *Second Dream* mimics Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Which is interesting because not only is Sor Juana pious, she is a mystic.

³⁴ Sor Juana's piousness is a great debate. For scholars who are interested in exploring a religious Sor Juana, I recommend that they turn to the theatrical reimagination for answers. Among them, I suggest a closer look at Portillo-Trambley's *Sor Juana*. I also recommend Estrella Genta's *Juana Inés de la Cruz: Poema Dramático* (1952).

story with her beloved *Condesa*, we see a Sor Juana who has had to choose between conceding to be “civilized” by her royal patrons and letting herself love and be loved by her confessor. To Padre Núñez, it is clear that Sor Juana has “forgotten [her] beginnings” and that she is “mejicana.”³⁵ Moreover, unlike the Condesa who is jealous of Sor Juana and who credits her success as a poet to the European colonization, we see that Padre Núñez makes a real effort to help Sor Juana understand that knowing who she is and who her people are is what is important. In the text below, we see an interaction between Sor Juana and Padre Núñez. They discuss how Sor Juana does not identify as a Mexican and how writing has blinded her because she cannot understand the hardships that her people are experiencing.

Father: Have you made peace with yourself?

Sor Juana: I do not know what you mean. I just confessed my sins to you. You have absolved me...

Father: Oh, the triviality of your sins! You're not even aware of your sins!

Sor Juana: You don't love me! You take such pleasure in trying to destroy what I believe...

Father: What you believe! It's what you are that's important. Look at your own people.

Sor Juana: What will you have me be?

Father: In Fresno, where I was born there is dry brittle shrub that clings ferociously to life. Its roots dig into the sand, the hostile sun violates The shrub shrivels up against the violence around. This is Mexico today— the Indian— the zambo slave. My spirit is like that shrub, my soul, my passions. I am a Mexican, so I fight! I beg money off the rich, I hide the fugitive, I scramble around for food medicine, because their hunger, their pain, their enslavement, their deaths wound, consume me...

Sor Juana: I feel with you, but you must understand— I fight the same struggle. My voice carries all over, my words of love, compassion, brotherhood, peace...

Father: I'm speaking of human beings— not words!

Sor Juana: You refuse to understand!

Father: And you refuse to see!³⁶

This interaction shows us how Sor Juana's transnationality and hybridity complicate her identity and relationship with her people. What Portillo-Trambley posits is that our fixation with Sor Juana can inform the way we view the understand the Chican@ experience. Sor Juana, however, struggles to understand what Padre Núñez has shared with her because the presence of the viceroy and vicereine

³⁵ Trambley, *Sor Juana and Other Plays*, 174.

³⁶ Trambley, 178.

have blinded Sor Juana's senses. Sor Juana has been pushed away from her *raza* and become "white-washed", and the only way to restore her community's trust will require her to renounce that which European powers granted her— an opportunity to become a scholar. However, as we see throughout the play, Sor Juana also struggles to forge relationships with her childhood friends, Slave Juana and Andres. Portillo-Trambley even makes Sor Juana choose between helping her friends and helping the palace settle a revolt. During the revolt Andres is wounded and Slave Juana asks for Sor Juana's help. This request is Sor Juana's last memory before she dies, and it is this memory that allows her to see who she really is. By trying to help Andres escape, Sor Juana re-joins her community, but there is a price. Portillo-Trambley chooses to have the royal guards hang Andres. As Sor Juana mourns the memory of her friend, she is re-enlightened and acknowledges that she was wrong in neglecting her community. Sor Juana states,

Sor Juana: I saw you dangling from the hanging tree. My eyes cannot erase it. A sovereign fact, this death of yours which was... a death of me. Oh, the raw concreteness of the world! The mind is not enough, is it? Oh, I have wept loudly in the dark and felt a copious guilt... And that dark, mysterious flow where not words exists— I found it, didn't I? Faith...³⁷

Thus, by discovering her "faith" Sor Juana is able to see for herself the colonial era's social oppression. Moreover, she realizes that the royal court discriminated against her friends and the people of Mexico.

(Sor) Juana

Another reimagination of Sor Juana is found in Karen Zacarías's *The Sins of Sor Juana* (2001). It is clear from Zacarías's work that it was of no surprise that Sor Juana's wit and creativity exposed her to new social circles and allowed her to develop into one of the finest scholars of the seventeenth

³⁷ Trambley, 188.

century. From the beginning, Juana, and her relatives, know that she is gifted. In this play only a few people can understand Sor Juana's gift, specifically Silvio and the Vicereine. Unlike the Vicereine, however, Silvio truly understands Sor Juana because he shares something with her that others do not. Silvio, too, had an absent father and was born out of wedlock, classifying him as a 'bastard'. These characteristics allow him to understand the struggles that Sor Juana experiences because he is much like her. Thus, this relationship allows Sor Juana to find an intimate friend unlike any other. Even though she did indeed have a close relationship with the Vicereine and her mother's slave, Xochitl, we are reminded that these women cannot always understand Sor Juana. In fact, it is curious that women cannot seem to understand Sor Juana's struggles in spite of sharing the same gender. Zacarías reveals that although the gender norms of the colonial era discriminated against women, they did not discriminate equally. The social system of the time was complex and the Vicereine, although a subject to her husband, was not treated like Xochitl because her class granted her respect. Moreover, Sor Juana is treated better than Xochitl even though they both are the Vicereine's subjects. This distinction is due to Sor Juana's *criolla* heritage and Xochitl's Aztec lineage.

In this play, Sor Juana's intellect is the source of her conflict because it complicates her situation at the court. If Juana wants to keep living in the court, she needs to be married. There is no particular reason why Sor Juana needs to be married aside from the social expectations which are enough to pressure her into accepting a marriage proposal. We quickly realize, however, that accepting the marriage proposal is a strategy meant to increase her chances of maintaining her access to an education. Accepting this marriage proposal, however, prevents her from fully coming to terms with her emotions, particularly as they relate to Silvio. Therefore, when Pedro wounds Silvio in a duel, Sor Juana struggles to forgive his duplicity.

Silvio: I waited by the oak and you did not come. You found out about the pact. Don't you understand?
I would die for you.
Juana: You lied to me.
Silvio: I wish...
Juana: Wishes are for still and quiet wells and I'm neither. No man's pact, prayer, or promise will shame me into silence. Not even yours.³⁸

In this scene, Sor Juana states that she will not be silenced or embarrassed by any man, even the man she loves. By taking a strong stance, Sor Juana challenges the status quo that assumes that all women will be submissive to their husbands and lovers. Here, Sor Juana demonstrates that women have independent minds and that being willing to love and to allow oneself to be loved, does not require that she become submissive. Therefore, Zacarías shows through her reimagination that a woman who breaks the confines of her social system can become an agent of her own life.

Zacarías exposes the double standards of the “stubborn men” and in doing so reflects that even the younger generations of men remain passive in rejecting the colonial era’s sexism. This detail is important because, in demonstrating that sexism and discrimination transcend time, Zacarías alludes to the idea that today’s sexism is the same as or worse than it was in the colonial era. In “Email de Amor a Sor Juana, Escrito el Día de San Valentín,” Maite Zubaire argues that this century is experiencing far more sexism and discrimination than in the colonial era. As Zubaire writes to Sor Juana, the *Sorjuanistas* reflect on her experience and violence against women, particularly the feminicides that occur in “ambos lados de [la] frontera [E.E.U.U y Mexicana]” [both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border].³⁹ Zubaire warns Sor Juana that pursuing a career in the academy today would be twice as challenging if not impossible. She writes, “Sor Juana, ese que cada paso hacia adelante, cada escalón superado, te iba costar el doble, el triple, el cuádruple [sic], que un hombre, solo por no serlo... interminable de la humillaciones, injusticias, y arbitrariedades a las que el estamento universitario

³⁸ Karen Zacarías, *The Sins of Sor Juana: A Play in Two Acts* (Woodstock, Ill: Dramatic Pub, 2001), 85.

³⁹ Maite Zubaire, “Email de Amor a Sor Juana, Escrito El Día de San Valentín,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 44, no. 2 (2019): 183–84.

somete a mis colegas mujeres.” [Sor Juana, every step forward, every ladder, was going to be twice, three times, four times more, than a man, simply for not being a man... endless humiliations, injustices, and the arbitrariness in which this institution, the academy, subjects my women colleagues].⁴⁰ Yet, there is hope to overcome this because the discriminatory system is beginning to crumble thanks to. Women created movements. Moreover, in establishing solidarity among women, the movement challenges oppressive powers and gains strength. The driver of this movement is Sor Juana because she willing to challenge men and expose their misogyny.⁴¹

In Zacarías’s work we see how Sor Juana becomes an icon. The Novice, an aspiring young nun who befriends Sor Juana in San Jerónimo, carries on with the practice of writing even after Sor Juana has renounced her greatest desire. In the closing scene, the Novice urges Sor Juana to accept the conditions of Padre Núñez in order be granted permission to write once more. Angrily, Sor Juana rejects the proposal and argues that she cannot accept the conditions because accepting a compromise will only normalize the subordination of women.

Juana: Tell [Padre Núñez] that I will not be constrained by what he ordains appropriate for a woman. I have done many things wrong, but I will not ask for forgiveness for my sex or my talent that God granted.

Novice: God have mercy. Are you crazy, Sor Juana?

Juana: Tell el Padre I will not write any poems honoring the Bishop, or Earth or Heaven because I never intend to write again. Never.

Novice: Sor Juana, be reasonable, Compromise. Padre Nuñez [*viz*] has not altogether prohibited you from...

Juana: I have “negotiated on everything that has ever crossed my path... and with every agreement lost a little of myself. And I have hurt others. I have betrayed family, friends, freedom... I have betrayed love. (She holds up the cross-stitching.) I will not betray this. Let God hear my testimony, let my words be etched in blood. I, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, swear never to write again... I vowed. I vowed. I vowed. God have mercy on our souls

Stage directions: Juana blows out the candle. Rests her head on the table. Lights go down. A light comes up on the Novice. She is looking at the paper with Juana’s bloodied handprint. She sets it down, opens a journal and begins to write.⁴²

⁴⁰ Zubaire, 184.

⁴¹ Zubaire, 185.

⁴² Zacarías, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, 90–91.

The end is symbolic, because even though Sor Juana stops writing, her spirit and commitment to the practice of writing is passed down to a Novice. This transhistorical legacy is also present in Gaspar de Alba and Lucero's opera, *Juana: An Opera in Two Acts* (2019). In measure 1003 of the second act, Sor Juana stabs her wrist with a quill and signs the testament that states that she will never write again. Here, the young Juana and the older Sor Juana are brought together on stage. From measure 1005 to 1007, young Juana sings, "Firmo con sangre," [I sign in blood], while the older Sor Juana joins her and sings in a mezzo-soprano range, a lower register than young Juana, "Yo, la peor del mundo," [I the worst of the world].⁴³ As Sor Juana continues to carry the note in E natural, the young Juana speaks, "Yo lo tengo este genio, si es malo, yo no me lo hice, naci [sic] con el y con el he de morir," [I have this nature, if it is evil, I did not create it, I was born with it and with it I shall die].⁴⁴

La Musa Chican@ y Lesbiana

In Alicia Gaspar de Alba's "Interview," Sor Juana is not performing the "character" of Sor Juana. Rather, Sor Juana is acting as the "actress" that plays the "character." This reimagination, unlike the others grants Sor Juana an objective voice that is, to a certain degree, not fictional because Sor Juana responds with her own words, albeit arranged in a specific order.

What distinguishes Gaspar de Alba's work from the other that I have analyzed above, is that she reclaims Sor Juana for a broader audience. In *With Her Machete in Her Hand*, Catriona Rueda

⁴³ Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Carla Lucero are using the vocal ranges to contrast the sexualities of the older Sor Juana, the young Sor Juana, *la Condesa*, and *el Alma*. The young Juana has a soprano voice while older Sor Juana has a mezzo-soprano voice. What are the implications of the vocal change? I believe that the change in vocal range is a comment on Sor Juana's sexuality because she becomes more masculine as she gets older. Masculinity, is of course, broadly defined. In the colonial era it seems like masculinity could include being a writer, readers, and/or scholar. Sor Juana's masculinity is thus, manifested as an androgynous figure of *el Alma*. *El Alma* is performed by a countertenor (note, however, that the production that I attended was play by Carmen Voskuhl. During the symposium, Lucero and Gaspar de Alba mentioned that the male actor who was going to perform *el Alma* was not able to begin rehearsals). *El Alma's* vocal range is important because the character has the same range of the older Sor Juana, but the character is actually meant to be male. In the opera, *la Condesa* has a soprano range and her costume and physical characteristics are much more feminine than those of Sor Juana. Thus, this is yet another character whose femininity is much more explicit than that of Sor Juana's own.

⁴⁴ Carla Lucero and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Juana: An Opera in Two Acts*, 2017, 158–59.

Esquibel argues that Gaspar de Alba has reclaimed “Sor Juana from her biographers” and ‘to reconfigure[s] [Sor Juana] not as a Hispanic but as a Chicana lesbian feminist.’⁴⁵

Unlike Portillo-Trambley, who also happens to be creating a Chican@ version of Sor Juana, Gaspar de Alba wants to show us a Sor Juana that was and is queer. Why would Gaspar de Alba do this? The love poems to *Lysi* (Countess of Paredes), for instance, are contested, and speculation is not enough to settle this sexuality debate. The question of sexuality is necessary because a lesbian Sor Juana challenges Mexican and U.S. homophobia. This challenge is necessary because it allows Gaspar de Alba to make another “radical” claim about *la décima musa*. Gaspar de Alba argues that in order to accept that Sor Juana as a “Chicana lesbian feminist” requires that we accept that these two groups are ‘educated.’⁴⁶ This characteristic then allows us to look beyond the racial identification of Sor Juana, and she can be claimed by Chican@s, Latin@s, and Mexicans.⁴⁷ Gaspar de Alba argues that in recuperating Sor Juana as a “Chicana lesbian feminist” we can look beyond race and class. To expand our classification of Sor Juana creating an intellectual, a feminist, a poet, a lesbian, or an agent for the subaltern classes.⁴⁸ This move, however, is not free of contradictions.

In order to reconcile these contradictions Gaspar de Alba must create Sor Juana as a *new mestiza*. Using Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on the *new mestizaje*, Gaspar de Alba argues that Sor Juana is “a model of the *nueva ciudadanía*, that is a woman of the Americas, product of colonization, employing her agency and her tongue to create an autonomous identity.”⁴⁹ The idea of women finding alternative ways to an autonomous identity is not new. Lisa Vollendorf has argued that Hispanic women, among them Sor Juana, engaged in a transatlantic political movement that granted women a platform to

⁴⁵ Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, “Sor Juana and the Search for (Queer) Cultural Heroes,” in *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*, 1st ed, Chicana Matters Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 69.

⁴⁶ Gaspar de Alba in Esquibel, 69.

⁴⁷ Esquibel, 70; Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman”: Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause* (University of Texas Press, 2014), 41–53.

⁴⁸ Gaspar de Alba in Esquibel, “Sor Juana and the Search for (Queer) Cultural Heroes,” 69–70.

⁴⁹ Gaspar de Alba in Esquibel, 72.

challenge the status quo.⁵⁰ The distinction, however, is that Vollendorf is looking at the Hispanic literary canon and situates Sor Juana in the Hispanic world. In recent scholarship, the movement between Hispanic and Mexican has been addressed by Chicano/a and Latin American studies scholars. This debate requires attention because understanding what the implications are if Sor Juana is Hispanic versus Mexican can shed light on Gaspar de Alba's project.

In a recent publication in the *Aztlán Journal*, Gaspar de Alba briefly explores the work of Spanish professor Jesús G. Maestro who asserts that Sor Juana is a product of the Spanish Conquest. For Maestro, Sor Juana is Hispanic because *la Hispanidad* made her possible. "Si Sor Juana ha sido posible, ha sido posible gracias a la hispanidad... y ténganse en cuenta que en la última instancia de no haber sido por Hernán Cortés, no tendríamos a una figura como Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz." [If Sor Juana has been possible, she has been possible thanks to *la Hispanidad*... we must consider that without Hernán Cortés, Sor Juana would not exist].⁵¹ Maestro acknowledges, like Gaspar de Alba, that Sor Juana experienced sexism, but in giving *la Hispanidad* credit for Sor Juana's development, he dismisses the reimaginings Mexican and Chicano@ Sorjuanistas created. Authenticity becomes an issue because Maestro has narrowed who can and who cannot claim Sor Juana. This claim brings into question who can and who cannot perform Sor Juana. The idea undermines the issue of the attacks Sor Juana experienced during the colonial era. In defending *la Hispanidad*, Maestro does not deny anyone's ability to claim Sor Juana's memory, but his argument brings into question the authenticity of Chicano@ and Latino@ reimaginings of Sor Juana. This doubt is because some of these works critique the *Hispanidad*, as we see in Portillo-Trambley's work. If Portillo-Trambley's play were

⁵⁰ See Lisa Vollendorf, "Across the Atlantic: Sor Juana, La Respuesta, and the Hispanic Women's Canon," in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz*, ed. Emilie L. Bergmann and Stacey Schlau, *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* 98 (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2007), 95–102.

⁵¹ Jesús G. Maestro, "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Racionalismo y Libertad en la Literatura Virreinal Novohispana," YouTube, April 4, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2DdoO4L88M&feature=youtu.be>.

categorized as inauthentic, then her own understanding of the discrimination perpetuated by the Spaniards is also brought into question.

In her Interview, Gaspar de Alba asks Sor Juana if she knows “[w]hat was [the] root of her persecution?”⁵² Sor Juana cannot provide a clear answer, for this record is absent in her writing, but responds by stating “[a] head that is a storehouse of wisdom can expect nothing but a crown of thorns... [but] I do not wish to say... that I have been persecuted for my love of my wisdom and letters, having achieved neither one or the other.”⁵³ Or in more simple terms, Sor Juana’s response suggests that those who claim that she was persecuted for seeking wisdom and writing letters are overlooking the issue. “Stubborn men” are responsible for creating barriers for women, and the only crime Sor Juana is guilty of during the colonial era is being a woman.

Gaspar de Alba continues her interview by deconstructing Sor Juana’s responses and demonstrating that her intellect was clearly misconstrued and not given equal consideration as that of men. Sor Juana states that “[w]hatever eminence, whether that of dignity, nobility, riches, beauty, or science, must suffer [the burden of envy and persecution]; but the eminence that undergoes the most severe attack is that of reason... For no other cause except that the angel is superior in reason is the angel above man; for no other cause does man stand above the beast but by his reason.”⁵⁴ Gaspar de Alba recognizes that for Sor Juana, human nature is rational and therefore is superior to beasts who lack the gift of reason. This, however, does not make man stand above all others. That is because man’s nature is limited what has been predetermined as human nature. Sor Juana adds that “no [man] wishes to be lower than another [in reason], [so] neither does he confess that another is superior in reason as reason is a consequence of being superior.” This logic, as Gaspar de Alba deconstructs it demonstrates Sor Juana’s intellectual capacity while exposing the contradictions of “stubborn men.”

⁵² Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 55.

⁵³ Alba, 55.

⁵⁴ Alba, 55.

Sor Juana argues that if women are human and if rationality is part of human nature, then it is human nature that women have a rational mind. Thus, it is inexcusable that women be persecuted for having rational minds.

Given that Sor Juana prides herself on having a rational mind, Gaspar de Alba presses Juana with more questions because she wants to know what Sor Juana's sense of herself was, specifically, of her body.⁵⁵ In understanding how Sor Juana grapples with the sense of her own body, Gaspar de Alba can also understand what Sor Juana's stance was on the dichotomized gender order of the colonial era, specifically how people of the time related to heteronormativity and heterosexuality. With these questions, Gaspar de Alba attempts to explore the "dark inclinations" for which Sor Juana was blamed. Her "dark inclinations" are a product of her desire to engage in writing. Sor Juana's early critics argue that her refusal to reject an intellectual mind is what makes her an abominable being. In her defense, however, Sor Juana calls upon God and states that it is He who has granted her human nature and as a result a rational mind. Thus, if a woman's rational mind disrupts society, it is God who should be blamed because it is He who is responsible for creating all human beings.

The topic of the rational mind continues throughout the interview. Gaspar de Alba asks Sor Juana about her sexuality and how being queer was classified as an irrational "inclination." This is of particular concern when discussing the love poems that Sor Juana wrote to María Luisa de Paredes. The poems are erotic in nature which has led scholars to speculate about her sexuality and relationship with *la Condesa*. Sor Juana dismisses the question of her sexuality by stating "[l]et us renounce this argument, let others, if they will, debate; some matter better left unknown no reason can illuminate." If something was "unknown" during the colonial era it was not logical. This leads Gaspar de Alba to posit a plausible answer to the real reason Sor Juana could have chosen to live in the convent. According to this argument, if homosexuality was classified as an "unknown" phenomenon, it was,

⁵⁵ Alba, 56.

therefore, not rational. The convent, on the other hand, was a place of logic where rational human beings could serve God and expand their own intellect. It is unclear how this occurs, and Gaspar de Alba does not provide a clear answer to this issue. She implies that perhaps the proximity to God in the sense of servitude to God, but also on behalf to God, could potentially, increase a nun's rational thinking. Because nuns are essentially marrying God, a supernatural being that transcends human nature, then "entering the convent would be the only rational way of hiding an irrational inclination and of exercising an unknown choice."⁵⁶

This ability to choose leads us to the conclusion of this section. Gaspar de Alba tells Sor Juana why Sor Juana has chosen to call herself *la peor* [the worst] and in doing so, we learn why outcasts of today, who self-identify as "the worst of all" find empowerment in Sor Juana's story. When Sor Juana renewed her vows, she did so by signing a testament that stated that she would renounce her greatest desires and move away from her "dark inclinations." Sor Juana becomes the worst of all because she "refused to be the kind of woman [her] society and [her] superiors expected [her] to be. [She] rejected their creations of [her]."⁵⁷ By rejecting the confines of her life and society, Sor Juana allows others the chance to reimagine her and gives herself the choice to be reimaged. She extends an invitation to modern-day *Sorjuanistas* to reject the 'classical' narrative and reimagine the life of a literary figure that can continue to combat the oppression of women.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how *Sorjuanistas* imagined Sor Juana, particularly Latin@s and Chican@s. I argued that each reimagination, although different, ultimately challenges the classical narrative and widens the scope in which we can imagine Sor Juana. The embodied Sor Juana that we see on stage serves as a stimulus for political awakening because spectators are forced to see a reality

⁵⁶ Alba, 61.

⁵⁷ Alba, 63.

that reflects their own. When analyzing these plays, we quickly learn that sexism, misogyny, and xenophobia, among other social inequities and inequalities are present in today's world as much as they were a part of Sor Juana's times.

Moreover, the structure of these reimaginings is essentially biographic, albeit embellished. The reimaginings are didactic because they address common questions. Who was/is Sor Juana? The reimaginings then pivot and showcase how the performance stems out and feeds into the present feminist and political movements that seek to empower women. We get to see how Sor Juana becomes a role model of Chican@s and Latin@s and how audiences can learn from Sor Juana by observing performances about her life.

What the performances show us is how Sor Juana transcends time and space— we see this through the use of flashbacks in all of the plays. In doing so, Sor Juana is capable of traveling through time and the modern-day adaptations become possible. By seeing Sor Juana in different social environments, we understand how this political project allows us to see Sor Juana exist in the modern day and how her experiences in the past parallel the challenges Latin@s and Chican@s living in the U.S face.

In the third, and final section of this project, I will share my intimate conversation with Sor Juana. I extend myself to her and reflect on our relationship, whatever it may be. Like the veteran *Sorjuanistas* before me, I have chosen to write a letter to Sor Juana. Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Dossier: Un Mariachi de Respuestas a la Décima Musa* published in the *Aztlán A Journal of Chicano Studies* (Fall 2019 issue) inspired this particular section. Gaspar de Alba has curated twelve letters from the Sor Juana aficionad@s. The letters are meant to create a critical dialogue around Sor Juana while allowing the writers a less formal setting which is both dialogical in nature and experimental. I was drawn to the Dossier because it allows me to revisit the idea of Sor Juana as a patron saint. Although I have stated that Sor Juana is not a saint, nor should she be confused with one, we can draw comparisons between

patron saints and Sor Juana. In particular, I find this connection valuable because these letters are a form of reverence towards *la décima musa*. In the dossier scholars express and summarize Sor Juana's impact on their careers. This range of perspectives showcases how Sor Juana's admirers, specifically Chicana artists, but also men, turn to Sor Juana for guidance. Through Sor Juana's memory, *Sorjuanistas* have been able to create a community which remembers the injustices that existed during the colonial era. Yet, the focus of these letters is more nuanced. Specifically, these letters praise Sor Juana and her perseverance. Rather than focusing on her demise, the letters demonstrate how Sor Juana continues to exist.

Yes, it is true that Sor Juana 'renounced' her greatest desire, or at least that is what we have all been made to believe. The reality, however, is that even if this bit of history is true, we cannot ignore the impact of Sor Juana's life. By engaging in the acts of reading and writing, she created a ripple within the colonial social framework, one even greater than the other women writers of her time. Based on the works I have analyzed, we can see that when we witness Sor Juana's demise at the end of each play, she does not actually disappear. More specifically, the 'death' that we see which should imply the end of Sor Juana's career is not actually implying that Sor Juana's career ended nor is it implying that Sor Juana's memory is stored away until she is 'rediscovered' in the 19th century. No, what we see is the immortalization of Sor Juana's memory. Through the embodiment of her character and the ongoing reimagination of her own narrative, audiences see fragments of Sor Juana enter the minds of other individuals.

Part 3

Querida Sor Juana,

I honestly am not sure where to begin. This letter is for you and, perhaps somewhat selfishly, also for me. I want to reflect on our *amistad* and try to pinpoint when I became one of your many aficionad@s— a *Sorjuanista*. This letter is inspired by the creative project completed by one of your closest *amigas*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba. How did you like the *gran fiesta* that she organized in your honor? I must say that it was quite an honor to witness a gathering of *Sorjuanistas* and see the opera about your life. This opera was the first time I had seen a live performance about you.

The first time I saw your face was on the 200 pesos note— this back when my family moved to México. Till this day, I am not really sure why we went to México, but what is clear is that this move would be responsible for introducing me to you. Seeing your face for the first time was strange. I remember clearly your deep stare, your face surrounded by books. And of course, you were accompanied by your most famous words, “Hombres necios que acusáis a la mujer sin razón, sin ver que sois la ocasión de lo mismo que acusáis” [Stubborn men who blame women without reason, accusing women without acknowledging that they are the real culprits for what is to blame]. Even at the age of seven I realized that you were critiquing the actions of men, but it would take a couple years before I could analyze this idea even further. Nevertheless, your words made an impact I never forgot. Your words resonated with me because my father, too, was an “hombre necio.” Living in México, but also living in the U.S. surrounded by Latino men, I knew how their *machismo* contributed to their stubbornness. The expectations for women have not changed and for this reason the relationship between my parents did not work out. My mother has goals and aspirations, but she was expected to

be submissive and stay at home. For many years, she gave into this system, but eventually even I realized that we could not abide by something we so adamantly disagreed with.

Surprisingly, I do not remember learning about you in class while I lived in México. This absence was interesting. How could you be on the Mexican currency but missing from the Mexican history books? This of course is a different conversation that does not concern this letter, but I bring it up because Paz has claimed you as a national figure. He claims you but never really acknowledges your absence in México. Of course, scholars studied your work, but was it not Dorothy Schons, *la primera Sorjuanista*, your *amiga rubia*, the one who ignited your popularity, both in the U.S. and México?

Years later, when I moved back to the US, I reencountered your image and your full-length poem of “Hombres necios” in my high school Spanish class. It is in high school where my journey towards becoming a *Sorjuanista* began. I knew you were the smartest woman who lived during the *virreinato*. What was unclear to me, however, was whether you were a “traitor.” Sor Juana, here you will notice my ignorance of Mexican history, but I want to be honest with you and share how I felt while I was there. After having learned about *la conquista* and Hernán Cortés’s encounter with the Aztecs, it seems like La Malinche’s actions put a scarlet letter on all women living in México. There was, or at least, there seemed to be, resentment towards women. Moreover, there also seemed to be much hate towards outsiders. By the time I arrived in México, the resentment was directed towards Mexican Americans and Mexicans who had moved to the US.

For the reasons above, I kept my knowledge and fascination with you a secret. According to my *profesores*, La Malinche was a traitor, and she was the reason why Hernán Cortéz conquered Tenochtitlán. One time while I was still attending school in México, one of my classmates told me that the eagle and snake on the flag were a representation of pure, loyal Mexicans defeating traitors like La Malinche. At the time, this seemed like a very insightful observation. I was astounded by how

clever and eloquent my peer sounded, but in retrospect it is, at least to me, an outrageous claim that alienates and discriminates against Mexican Americans. Sor Juana, comments like these are xenophobic and racist. My first experience of xenophobia was in México. It was so vivid, and I do not think that I will ever forget it. My classmate's goal was to educate me and teach me a lesson since in his eyes my family and I were traitors. My mom was a single mom in a town where being a single parent was unheard of. There were unhappy marriages, but never divorces. Thus, my family's presence was disrupting the "normal" of the town we chose to call home. When I think back, my classmate's conclusions and interpretations of the symbolism behind the Mexican flag seem logical if they follow a certain logic of the order of things. I do not resent him, nor do I blame him for having an opinion. But I think this "logic" demonstrates how some people who have an actual claim to México are denied it and categorized as outcasts, *traidores*.

In spite of all that I have shared with you, I am aware that you are celebrated in México. There is a university named in your honor and in 2016, the limited television series *Juana Inés* premiered on Canal 11. This show honors your memory, and for the first time, we see a Mexican media source admit that you were a queer woman. What is interesting, however, is that the women who love you, are somewhat erratic. The lovers, specifically the women lovers, are often characterized as being obsessive in their affection towards you. You were not depicted as such, but you are sassy, *a fresa*. Thus, you have an excess of personality that was disruptive to the colonial era and 20th century Mexican culture.

This television series demonstrates that you are a symbol of pride and implies that México has also grown over the past year. Not only is a woman the star of a popular show, this woman is part of the LGBTQ community. People want to claim you and use your image because you are talented, and your image carries legitimacy. In recent years you have become the icon for feminist movements in the Latin American world. So of course, you now are equated with progress. In claiming you, México

hopes to become synonymous with progress. I was ignorant to all of the new progressive interpretations that were written about you. I did not want to study your work out of fear. Yes, I know what you might be thinking. *¿Como me deje llevar?* But the reality, *mi Querida Sor Juana*, is that I felt pressured to study western authors because explaining their success is easier. I would not have to justify Shakespeare's success or give him much of a back story. For you, on the other hand, I am expected to justify why your body of work requires scholarly attention. I must justify why and how your personal story and the stories your created fit within the borders of the western literary canon. Thus, not only am I working on finding creative ways to pursue my own scholarly interests, I am also required to justify why my interests have merit and by extension why the academy should bother making room for you. I feel uncomfortable every time I have to explain your story and give reasons as to why you are worthy of study. I question myself and my work because I feel as if my scholarship is being brought into question. My essays and presentations about you seem to be under scrutiny and I feel vulnerable. What if I make a mistake? What if I misrepresent you and ruin the work of other *Sorjuanistas*?

Sor Juana, I am already working twice as hard to find a place within academic spaces. I find that I sometimes also have to worry about justifying my scholarly passions. I become overwhelmed and feel inadequate. I have learned that explaining your story is not the same as justifying the *why study you question* I am often asked when I mention your name. It is tiresome because in my experience people seem to be more concerned with the individuals who influenced your work. In essence, your 'unofficial' teachers take the spotlight from you. You were of course influenced by major literary figures, such as Lope de Vega, Calderon, Aristotle, among many others. These scholars deserve some credit, but the truth is that your creativity was your own and your work should be recognized. If someone wants to study these scholars they should not do so at your expense. In order to cope with such pressures, I had to learn how to feel comfortable in these situations and gain control of these

conversations. I welcome questions and whenever some asks me *why you*, I respond with *why not you*. I now realize that the pressure was all in my head. *Me deje llevar por el que diran*. Coming to this realization, however, does not eliminate my discomfort with the questions. I still stumble but knowing how to respond has certainly given me more confidence in myself and in you.

I have been working on unlearning a bad habit. There was a time when I rejected you because choosing to study someone else would be easier. For instance, if I studied Shakespeare's work, I would not have to explain why I study Shakespeare. His popularity is widely known and is universally assumed that his work is exceptional. Your work, on the other hand, would be questioned because it is unknown. People do not question a person who studies Shakespeare because the assumption is that he was brilliant with words simply because he is known. Even if someone is unfamiliar with Shakespeare's plays, I would not be expected to justify why I study Shakespeare. I realize that your popularity is not the same as Shakespeare and I do expect a long list of questions. The problem, however, is that many answers that I give often prove unsatisfying to most. I worry that the dissatisfaction is a sign of how I have failed at convincing someone that your story has value. I also worry that I have embarrassed you in public. In choosing you over Shakespeare, I forfeit the option of not justifying why I have chosen to study you. And that is the intimidating part! How can I be expected to explain who you are when I cannot even explain who I am? Part of the reason I have chosen to look at you, specifically, is because while I am studying your work and works about you, I gain insight as to who I am.

Of course, you are México's Shakespeare. I would dare say that you are more than Shakespeare, because in truth you were more than a simple poet and playwright, but only your true friends know that. Everyone else would question that reality. *Sorjuanistas* are not only introducing you to modern audiences, they are also attempting to show how your work has value. Thus, it should be part of our study. Sor Juana, the truth is that I was scared and very nervous to study your work. There were several

moments in which I felt inadequate and unworthy of touching your story. That view has changed over time, and I am now much more confident when I write about you. I know feel very comfortable sharing specific examples that I think will hook others into trusting you and my own scholarship. In essence, the justification never truly goes away, but I have no longer simply try to explain why we need to study you. I demonstrate why your story continues to be relevant and how understanding your narrative adds value to what we already know about injustices and social pressures

For instance, I often begin by explaining that the social attention for a colonial era woman was “bad” and “dangerous.” I explain how your popularity as a scholar made you vulnerable as a woman. Being popular jeopardized your honor and that of your family. As described by your first biographer, el Padre Calleja, “[Sor Juana] corría el riesgo de desgraciada por discreta y, con desgracia no menor, de perseguida por hermosa” [Sor Juana ran the risk of being disgraced for not being discreet, moreover, her beauty garnered attention.]⁵⁸ This particular concern about honor, in spite of being quite conservative and putting the weight of responsibility on your shoulders, is probably one of the most defining points in your life. That is, because your aunt and uncle, who took care of you at the time, ultimately decided that it would be best if you lived in the viceregal's court where your honor could be protected and preserved. This placement is not to say that your family lacked an appreciation for your talents, but it is true that they did not endorse your ‘abnormal’ behavior. Little did they know, that by introducing you to the viceregal palace, your family, who had hoped that being a lady-in-waiting would increase your opportunity for marriage, you were steps closer to becoming one of the best scholars and writers of the century. The recently arrived vicereine Leonor Carreto de Mancera had the pleasure of meeting you. Your intelligence quickly impressed the marquis, and as a result, you were immediately offered a place in the court.

⁵⁸ García Valdés, “Apunte Biográfico,” 14.

What was not clear, however, was how you could capitalize on this new opportunity, since after all, the social and cultural expectations of the colonial era discriminated against all women. As a lady-in-waiting, you were expected to marry. Yet, in spite of the lack of privilege granted to women during this time, it was not unheard of for women to pursue careers as writers. As Amy Kaminsky notes in *Water Lilies: An Anthology of Women Writers from the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Century* (1995), several noble women were able to have careers as writers. Lisa Vollendorf also speaks about a nun before your time, Teresa de Avila, who in the 1580s pioneered the transatlantic political and literary movement of which you are now a part. This movement and canon seek to expose the oppression of the social system and hope to vindicate women's position in society.

Many women writers used the *sarao*, for example, as a space to secure an audience and as the setting for their own written work as we could see in Maria de Zayas's *La Traición en la Amistad*. Yet, what fascinates me most, is that you were not alone in this new and challenging endeavor. Your mindset was one that many other women have shared, before and after your time. Then Sor Juana, the question is why are you different? Yes, of course, being a woman who happened to become a writer was 'extraordinary' given the time period, but it was not unheard of. So why you? I think that we should turn to your personal background and study how your gender, combined with you being a *criolla* born out of wedlock, and who had an absent father, makes your story that much more intriguing to study.

My intent is not to romanticize the hard conditions that you faced. Rather, I think that by isolating the 'other' social predispositions that challenged your growth as a writer and scholar can help us understand you more. *¿Que piensas, a bit much? Tal vez, pero creo que es bueno soñar...* especially about the "what if." Your own personal story sets you apart from your contemporaries. One of your other *amigos*, *el profe* Ilan Stavans, has tried, by looking at your 'handicaps', in *Sor Juana or the Persistence of Pop* (2018) to explain how you stand out.

El profé, writes that “[t]he world in which Sor Juana was thrown was obsessed with, and nervous about, race and identity.”⁵⁹ The racial hierarchy positioned the ruling *españoles* at the top of the pyramid, this group was followed by the *criollos* or American-born descendants of the Spaniards, then the part-European and part-native *mestizos*, then the *castizos* whose heritage was *mestizo* and white, who were followed by *indios*, *mulatos*, *zambos*, and other ethnic mixtures of Indian and African slaves.⁶⁰ Stavans argues that gender, too, played a significant role in the classification of individuals, but perhaps not in the way in which we would think. Stavans posits that the *conquistadores*, unlike the English colonialist, crossed the Atlantic without spouses.⁶¹ This detail shows us that being a woman during the *conquista* granted women more space since their husbands, or potential husbands, were preoccupied with other things. The difference between these women and yourself, however, is that many of them held a more privileged social position and the *conquista* was slightly different during the seventeenth century when colonialism was much more established. Men had settled and could return their attention to women. Ilan Stavans explores your ‘handicaps’ and argues that in addition to your gender, which was already a discriminating factor, you had to overcome other challenges. Stavans writes, that “[i]n Sor Juana’s time, women were restricted to three milieus: the domestic, the courtly, and the monastic.” Crazy, right?

Sor Juana, I conclude this letter by offering you and myself, room to reflect. Specifically, I would like us to consider why reimagining you is important. In this project, I bring together reconstructed narratives of your past. In many ways the *Sorjuanistas* and I are engaging in acts of mythmaking because

⁵⁹ Ilan Stavans, *Sor Juana: Or, the Persistence of Pop*, Latinx Pop Culture (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2018), 32.

⁶⁰ Stavans, 33.

⁶¹ Stavans, 33.

we use your historical archive to craft a new narrative that has multiple meanings. Through this, your life can now show us different perspectives that keep you relevant in today's society. But again, you might be wondering why we do this? Especially since many of the reimaginings that are created about you are heterogenous narratives that are works of fiction. The incompleteness of your archive gives us flexibility to construct a story about you that is founded on truth, but that can also develop into new forms authentic stories that have significant meaning for individuals of various backgrounds. Your multiplicity is achieved by the *Sorjuanistas* who expand your identity(ies) in efforts that it can resonate with contemporary audiences who have more than one identity.

When weaving together fragments of your past to construct narratives that expose the challenges you faced, the scholar-artists leave room for ambiguity. This area of ambiguity is what makes your reimaginings exciting and why the theatre is the best medium for recreating your past and present self. A physical embodiment gives you the opportunity to share your own voice while the voice of another can center it in contemporary settings.

For now, I have to say goodbye, but remember that you exist within us— *en tus Sorjuanist@s*.

Until then, remember *que te quiero amiga*.

-Uriel

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