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Sorjuanismo: Tracing Academic Devotion Towards Sor Juana

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Abstract

I begin this essay with a short anecdote that describes a gathering of *Sorjuanistas*, a group of scholars who have devoted their careers in analyzing the life and literary work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1684-95). I argue that even though the study of Sor Juana is usually interpreted as an academic endeavor, recent artistic projects have proven otherwise. *Sorjuanistas* have become scholar-artists who use the narrative of Sor Juana to shed light on the injustices experienced by Latin@ and Chicana@ individuals living in the United States. By creating dramatic works, *Sorjuanistas* exhibit their devotion towards Sor Juana. The dramatic works also show us how Sor Juana's narrative can help us rethink the way in which we understand history. In particular, I argue that the dramatic works created by *Sorjuanistas* are embodied performances. With this framework in mind, I look at the embodiment of Sor Juana as heritage performance. Heritage performance is essential in helping us understand the relevance of Sor Juana in the 21st century because it allows us to challenge the way in which history is created. Thus, the performance of bodies is a way of knowing and creating our understanding of Sor Juana and by extension the people who see her as their "patron" or role model.

Keywords: Sorjuanistas, Dorothy Schons, Octavio Paz, Heritage Performance, Memory and Mythmaking, Body as an Archive, Reimagination of Historical/Literary Figures, Décima Musa, Devotional Literature

“entre vuestras plumas ando, / no como soy, sino como / quisisteis imaginarlo”
[among your words I am / not how I *am*, but how / you have imagined me]
(Juana Inés de la Cruz 407)

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 developed a strong social network work 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, however, 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 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 wrote works considered the literary peak of *el siglo de oro* [Spanish Golden Age] (late 15th to mid 17th centuries). 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].

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. The *Sorjuanistas* whom I reference in essay are part of what I call an “academic faction”. This group of scholars are part of an academic movement that revolves around making sense of and reimagining Sor Juana's memory and literary archive. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, each faction of *Sorjuanistas* has decided on new approaches about how to study and preserve the memory of Sor Juana. For the purposes of this essay, I have chosen to focus on exploring the work of the scholars who embrace the power of performance art to recreate and reimagine a Sor Juana for the 21st century.

Among these *Sorjuanistas*, we find Alicia Gaspar de Alba, professor of Chicana/o studies, English, and gender studies at UCLA, and the person responsible for the gathering, the two-day symposium entitled “*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 served as a segue, or in the words of Gaspar de Alba, as a “dramatic prequel,” to 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).

As a performance studies scholar interested in the contemporary reimaginings of Sor Juana, I could not have found a more suitable event to inspire and inform my own research. 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. It is the combination of history and drama that allows *Sorjuanistas* to 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 is because performing Sor Juana, much like any performance, has the potential of influencing 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 (Taylor, *Performance* 6). 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

reappropriates her reality. When staged, this reappropriation 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 knowing,” or, as stated by Taylor, an episteme (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 3). To explore this further, I suggest that we take Taylor’s idea of body *as* an archive and pair it with the idea of heritage performances. In this way, we can find ways to see how the body is the main driver behind the history making that happens on stage.

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) (Bissell and Haviland xv). Thus, the embodied performance 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”(Smith 129). 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 (Smith 139).

If we consider the dramatic works created by *Sorjuanistas*, we see that it goes beyond the scope of Sor Juana’s literature. These dramatic works also capitalize 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 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. These 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, however, 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, specifically how women's role in society was undermined by institutions of power, but also 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 it is being interpreted by scholars, 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 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 the spectator their own capacity for transformation (Taylor, *Performance*; Taylor, "Scenes of Cognition"). 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 about 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. The process of reimagining Sor Juana is in and of itself a form of embodied expression which reappropriates the archive and which allows us to develop a repertoire of performance that challenges the history of Sor Juana. Through performance, the classical narrative becomes distorted by *Sorjuanistas*, 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 (1898-1961), during the mid-twentieth century. Schons 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 attempts 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?

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” (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* xvi). 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 imaginations and reimaginations 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 presenting 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 range of creativity; 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. Through performance art, her archive is mobilized, and Sor Juana’s memory is embodied. 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 previous work already published. 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*

My work explores how scholar-artists 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.

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. 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 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 incorporated into a dramatic work is that a scene of a young girl adopting Sor Juana's scholarly inclinations often follows it. 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 and 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 (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 (Taylor 356).

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”). Thus, the academic devotion *Sorjuanistas* have toward Sor Juana elevate her status because they conceive of her as a guide and advocate for marginalized scholars, women, queer identifying individuals, and more.

Mobilizing and Reimagining Sor Juana on Stage

In *Sor Juana and Other Monsters* (2015), Luis Felipe Fabre summarizes the behavior of all *Sorjuanista* fanatics:

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 (Fabre 2–3).

[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 re-imaginings of Sor Juana. Like other scholarly debates about Sor Juana, performance art is 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.¹ 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 distinguish itself from other kinds of art that also seek to reimagine her? To answer

¹ 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.

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 (Taylor, “Scenes of Cognition”). Thus, in our creations of Sor Juana we create dramatic work that can be used for entertainment, but 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 she has become a new creature has categorized Juana 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” (Schons 147). 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, 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, performance 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 theatre 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.

Forging my argument at the convergence of literary, performance, and religious studies, I suggest that these four theatrical works offer a means to uncover 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 theatre, the resurrected Sor Juana adapts and negotiates power in real time, bridging past and present structures of oppressive powers to show their persistence over time. I argue that Sor Juana's presence within American theatre has made her a quintessential figure of social progress, particularly for Chican@ and Latin@ individuals. These reimagined narratives highlight some of Sor Juana's greatest challenges during the colonial era. Through my research, I have demonstrated that the purpose of reimagining *la décima musa* empowers and informs subjugated individuals. Rather than presenting a subjugated Sor Juana who is ultimately defeated, authors remember a woman who sacrificed her greatest desire. Through this sacrifice, Sor Juana cements her legacy, because another 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 as an outrageous claim to say she does the same in the real world.

I have also suggested that we look at these dramatic works as hagiographies because Sor Juana takes on the elevated status granted to patron saints. 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. In researching Sor Juana's career, I have demonstrated that these "random" theatrical interpretations can be brought into conversation with each other and analyzed through a devotional literary lens. Thus, showing that members of the academy exhibit an ardent commitment towards Sor Juana because her story carries weight and teaches us how to navigate our challenging and modern world. As I continue to expand my work on Sor Juana, I invite others to Sor Juana and the multiple dramatic works that resurrect this figure for modern generations.

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