

The Criticism is Coming from Inside the Casa: Sor Juana's Colonial Critique

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* on 06/28/2023, available online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2023.2200095>

Permanent link to this version <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14078/3413>

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The Criticism is Coming from Inside the *Casa*: Sor Juana's Colonial Critique

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Abstract: The debates surrounding Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's fictional work have frequently centered on her use of autobiographical details to inform her characterizations and plots. In *Los empeños de una casa*, Sor Juana incorporates not only her personal details but also her deep connections to Mexico as a colonized state, to an extent not yet fully explored by scholars. Thus, she breaks the rules of her peninsular counterparts, and subsequently critiques Spain as an imperial power under the guise of a simple *comedia de capa y espada*. Although the *gracioso* servant, Castaño, has always been obviously a colonial figure, there are arguments that two more of the protagonists have New World roots. As the play progresses, we find they can overcome the machinations of their peninsular foils at least in part due to their outsider status, ultimately demonstrating a kinder, gentler form of living and loving. Given the play's original intended audience of religious and secular powers, this demonstrates not only Sor Juana's subtle genius, but her ability to fly under the radar of her potential censors, ultimately foreshadowing the issues that would arise as Spain's reach grew into an uncontrollably large empire, destined to fail.

Keywords: Sor Juana, colonial, *gracioso*, *Los empeños de una casa*, empire, power, *comedia*

Although undoubtedly one of the greatest creative minds of her time, many of the debates around Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's fictional work have centered on the autobiographical details that can be found in her characters. Despite this concentration on her life as material for protagonists such as Leonor in *Los empeños de una casa*, some critics have had a harder time finding her New World roots reflected in her work.¹ The dramaturg is willing to take risks and include characters and material concepts of the Other that transform her narrative from a typical *comedia de capa y espada* into a tribute, albeit subtle at times, to her homeland. In *Los empeños de una casa* (*Casa*), Sor Juana incorporates what Fina García Marruz calls her *mexicanía* to an extent not yet fully explored by scholars. This in turn allows her to break the rules of the societal honor code that restrains her peninsular predecessors, subsequently critiquing the imperial powers that reign over her beloved homeland. Although the play is set in Toledo, there are three New World characters hidden in plain sight, whose presence not only reflects the realities of Sor Juana's lived experiences, but whose demeanours and endeavours ultimately triumph over their peninsular counterparts and open a space of critique directed at the secular and religious powers for whom the play was originally created.

In the play, siblings Ana and Pedro have recently relocated to Toledo from Madrid, but in the interim between Pedro's business dealings away from home, Ana has seen and been seen with Juan, who subsequently follows her to Toledo. Juan uses her servant, Celia, to gain entry to the siblings' home in an attempt to win the fickle Ana back. None of these three—four, if we count Celia—indicates any origin outside of the capital city. The other two nobles entangled in the plot, Carlos and Leonor, are outsiders both to the house and, as I will show below, quite possibly the entire country. The final, and most obvious of the three outsiders, is Carlos's servant and the play's *gracioso*, Castaño.

Although José Juan Arrom posits that Sor Juana’s characters “adquieren cierto matiz diferenciativo que lleva el sello personal de la autora...[particularmente] en las damas y en el gracioso” (82) and that both she and Juan Ruíz de Alarcón are innovative as a result of their colonial backgrounds, he does not comment on the specifics of how that affects her play’s development. García Marruz similarly considers Sor Juana’s references to her background to be found primarily in reading between the lines:

Más “entre” sus letras que en sus letras mismas, la mexicanía de Sor Juana late soterrada, vena de plata huidiza. Desconcertante espejo de dos lunas, sumisión y altivez, recato y cortesía. Fruto de dos terquedades, la vasca y la indígena, no va nunca en una sola dirección. Su sutileza conceptista da siempre una nueva torcedura a la espiral cognoscitiva, pero ve en el caracol un tratado de música, no una forma retorcida sino finalmente armoniosa. Muy a la mexicana, reduce para abarcar. (6)

For García Marruz, these details are subtle, almost non-existent in the works themselves. As I will show, a close reading of the text reveals details that once seen cannot be unseen—much like our secondary female character, Ana.² María Esther Pérez, on the other hand, finds significant New World references in the nun’s *oeuvre*, enough to fill an entire book, *Lo americano en el teatro de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Still, the section titled “La comedia *Los empeños de una casa*” finds Pérez focusing primarily on the shorter pieces surrounding the three acts that make up the *festejo teatral* that accompanies the *comedia*. That said, Pérez’s analysis of these pieces of *teatro breve* demonstrate that from the *loa* on, Sor Juana is setting up her audience to hear a critique of the king’s representatives: “A María, la virreina, la llama ‘diosa de la Europa / diedad de las Indias’, y del virrey dice: ‘El Cerda, que pisa / la cerviz ufana / de América Altiva’.

Endiosa a la virreina y en el virrey señala su gran poder, pero es curioso ver cómo indica que

pisa, es decir, doblega o somete a la orgullosa América” (71). Michael Horswell, commenting on the same lines, does not obfuscate: “The violence of the ‘encounter’ is alluded to in the metonymic figure of the viceroy stepping on the neck of haughty America” (68). When Pérez gets to the *comedia* itself, she focuses on Leonor, as many other critics have previously, as the author’s fictional double. She takes their connection a step further than most, beyond their intellect and temperament, to insinuate a shared geographical heritage. Citing part of Leonor’s first explanation of her predicament to Ana and focusing specifically on the lines “Era de mi patria toda / el objeto venerado” (1.321–2) and a reference to “reinos extraños” (1.334), Pérez states:

Leonor era venerada en “su patria” y ¿cuál era su patria? La América, pero no creemos que, exactamente, con absoluta unanimidad, “patria” fuese la ciudad.... “Mi patria”, dice Leonor, porque ella, al igual que su autora, se siente asociada de corazón y de voluntad a un grupo de hombres que ya no son españoles, porque esa otra patria, la de sus abuelos y su padre, la considera “reinos extraños”... habló aquí la monja criolla, la americana. (75)

That said, the word *patria* is not unique to Leonor in this play. Juan also uses it to underscore his sacrifice in following Ana to Toledo a short time later:

Clicie de tus luces claras,
dejé, sólo por servirte,
el regalo de mi casa,
el respeto de mi padre
y el cariño de mi patria (1.826–30)

We know that the *patria* he left behind was precisely a city: Madrid. Still, Pérez is determined in her reading of Leonor as *americana* as Sor Juana herself, and cites other words from the same

speech such as “deidad, ídolo, superstición; palabras muy usadas en el medio religioso de México por la lucha de los misioneros en la conquista espiritual de América; es cierto que los españoles hablaron de deidades, pero *ídolo*, *idolatría*, etcétera, tuvieron un significado profundo, dramático, algunas veces, en la conquista y colonización de América” (75). Admittedly, I find the Leonor-Mexico connection to be the most tenuous of the three but given that she has been proven time and again to be a self-portrait of the dramaturgical nun, there is probably some truth to Pérez’s reading.

Sylvia G. Carullo makes the most detailed argument for Leonor as Sor Juana but does not specifically remark on her use of *patria*. Rather, her argument centers around the qualities imbued in the character as “atractiva e inteligente, rodeada de gente de la corte, ambiente que integra un grupo que también ella frecuentó” (103). The connection to the New World for Carullo lies more in the details of Leonor’s escapades in the court and their reflection of Sor Juana’s youth as a *dama* to the vicereine: “El público que la aclama, según dice en la autorrepresentación, puede ser el del ambiente de la corte mexicana, y aquel amplio grupo que la sigue en su carrera intelectual” (102). Although Carullo does not categorize Leonor as a colonial figure as directly as Pérez does, she demonstrates that the details in the explanation of her life experience are based on those of Sor Juana’s in the Viceregal court of Mexico, connecting Leonor inextricably to the New World, even if that was not the author’s conscious intention.

Castaño is a known New World figure, as he himself tells us in his description of his transformation into a *tapado*. Sor Juana’s naming of the character after a chestnut tree points to his skin colour. Again, this is a known detail; as he dresses himself in Leonor’s clothing, he specifically chooses a blue skirt to complement his skin tone:

Ahora entran las basquiñas.

¡Jesús, y qué rica tela!
 No hay duda que me esté bien,
 porque como soy morena
 me está del cielo lo azul. (3.327–31)

García Marruz agrees that the name is an indication of the colour of his skin: “La complicidad es evidente.... Castaño recuerda el color de la raza indígena...” (11), but goes further, believing that his speech as he uncloaks himself that confirms his New World origins: “Castaño dice en uno de los parlamentos de *Los empeños de una casa* que nació en las Indias, y no tendría que decírnoslo, cuando vemos que, descubriéndose del disfraz de mujer de alto rango, dice: ‘No soy sino el perro muerto / de que se hicieron los guantes’” (11). Since she does not give more explanation, we cannot be certain as to her interpretation of this line, but I disagree with the reading that it is further proof of Castaño’s racial make-up. “Dar perro muerto” was said in the court “cuando engañan a una dama dándola a entender que uno es un gran señor” (Correas 576). Thus, calling himself “perro muerto” as a descriptor would seem to indicate that Castaño is referring to his tricking Pedro into believing he is a gran señora. As far as the second verse, “de que se hicieron los guantes,” he might be referring more literally to the fact that he had to use Leonor’s gloves to cover his hands, lest he give himself away as both more masculine and not of the same skin tone as the real Leonor. It could, however, also refer to the fact that he was backed into a corner out of which his only escape was the disguise. As described in the 1734 edition of *Autoridades*: “Poner a uno como un guante. Frase con que se da a entender, que a uno se le ha reducido a ejecutar alguna cosa, en que no tenía gusto, o por medio de la reprehensión o castigo, o por ruegos y promesas” (“Guantes”). This was an idiomatic expression that demonstrated the trapped feelings of the character. Castaño chooses to accept Pedro’s proposal as he realizes it is

his only possible escape route out of the house but does so under duress and to secure the promise that no violence will be used against him by his fiancé.

Viviana Díaz Balsera labels Castaño “mulato,” presumably based on his description of his skin as “morena” (67). Horswell takes the same descriptor and proclaims him “mestizo and Mexican” (73). Other critics have noted that Castaño is undoubtedly from the Indies, but few have commented on the specifics of his racial background. Arrom, for example, also notes Castaño’s reference to his home, but labels him *criollo*: “Castaño insiste en aclarar que él es criollo, y hasta tiene por santo de su devoción —burla burlando— aun pícaro paisano suyo, Martín Garatuza” (85). The line to which Arrom refers—and subsequently cites—only states “nací en ellas” (*ellas* referring to *las Indias*) (3.296). Although I disagree with García Marruz’s assumptions based on the lines cited above, I have to agree that Castaño is more than just *criollo* (that is, born of two Iberian parents), based on the information the character provides about his physical appearance. Between García Marruz’s assertion that he is Indigenous, Horswell’s claim that is he *mestizo*, and Díaz Balsera’s that he is *mulato*, however, I cannot find enough further evidence to definitively come to a conclusion.

That said, Sor Juana’s relationship to the Indigenous part of her cultural heritage is significant. For one, Sor Juana spoke and wrote in Nahuatl, as evidenced by her bilingual poem “Tocotín” (1677), based on an Indigenous dance and composed for inclusion in the loa of *El divino Narciso*. Her inclusion in *Casa* of a character with Indigenous origins who is portrayed as not just a stereotype is not only probable, but almost to be expected. That he is Carlos’s servant, likely means that Carlos himself is connected to the New World in some way. Textually we find evidence of this in Leonor’s description of Carlos:

forastero, mas tan claro

*por su origen, que en cualquiera
 lugar que llegue a hospedarlo,
 podrá no ser conocido,
 pero no ser ignorado (1.394–8, emphasis mine)*

This makes our *forastero* likely a second or third generation *criollo*, much like the author herself. She tells us his skin is quite light given his place of birth, which means that while he may or may not be of a family with social status, his ascendancy is likely entirely Spanish, but certainly he himself was born in the Indies. Medical theories of the time posited that those of European descent who were born or lived a significant portion of their lives in the New World would be physically altered by the differing climates. Juan de Cárdenas published the first medical treatise in Mexico on the effects of the New World on Spaniards, *Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias* (1591), which posited that exposure to the climate of the New World could have various physical and mental effects on the European body (179v-80r). Given the mores and censorship proceedings surrounding the theater at the time of the play's composition, I would not venture to say that Sor Juana was expecting Carlos could be performed by a mixed-race actor as a mixed-race character and win the female protagonist over a traditional peninsular figure, but I would assert that his lineage ties him to the New World, as a *criollo* at minimum. As such, he might have also had the ability to finance a move up the social ladder, even back in Spain.

Lest his clear complexion not be enough, Leonor's description of Carlos to Ana continues, denoting his androgynous beauty, pointing to an "other worldliness" that affirms his origins in another part of the Spanish Empire, and ultimately turns him into the allegorical representation of the conquered Indies:

Era su rostro un enigma

compuesto de dos contrarios
 que eran valor y hermosura,
 tan felizmente hermanados,
 que faltándole a lo hermoso
 la parte de afeminado,
 hallaba lo más perfecto
 en lo que estaba más falto;
 porque ajando las facciones
 con un varonil desgarro,
 no consintió a la hermosura
 tener imperio asentado... (1.407–18)

Matthew Stroud's queer reading of this passage maintains that Leonor's repeated assertions that there is no femininity in his beauty can only be read as evidence to the contrary (107), while Georgina Dopico Black calls the description a "confession [that] not only reveals the sexually ambiguous quality of Carlos's gallantry but points also to a possible homoeroticism on Leonor's behalf" (182). In any case, what she is truly telling us is that his *enigmatic face* is composed of opposing forces that denote masculine and feminine traits equally.

In art, the continents were frequently represented allegorically as female figures, with the Americas often portrayed as a naked, Indigenous woman whose weaknesses were starkly obvious in contrast with her European and Asian counterparts. In Jan van der Straet's (Stradanus) famous drawing-turned-engraving (by Theodoor Galle) of Amerigo Vespucci's first encounter with an Indigenous woman, we find an almost naked woman, stripped of any

identifying materials, lying back on a hammock with the explorer towering over her, holding scientific and religious symbols.

<<insert image 1 here>>

Allegory of America, from New Inventions of Modern Times (Nova Reperta), plate 1 of 19 ca. 1600, Theodore Galle, after Jan van der Straet (also called Stradanus). Reproduced from the Met Museum website under the Met's Open Access API.

Here, as in Carlos's face, the feminine—and his upbringing in the colonies—is represented by *hermosura*, while the masculine—and his European ancestors—would have been aligned with *valor*. And yet, Leonor's description marks the two as inseparable identities—"tan felizmente hermanados"—that find perfection in their opposing yet related natures, while simultaneously tearing each other apart. The last four quoted lines drive Sor Juana's point home, speaking equally to the opposing nature of Carlos's status as a colonial subject, as well as Spain's imperial hold over the Indies. Although Stroud translates the last line as "to reign unchecked" (106), I believe the use of the word *imperio* is deliberate on Sor Juana's part and Carlos's contrasting factions allude to the conquest of Spain, as a masculine, military force over the New World, in turn feminized and full of natural beauty, but in need (from the Spanish colonial perspective) of taming. Definitively, we must consider Carlos's *forastero* status not only as one not from the city, as it is often assumed, but that of—at the very least—*criollo*.³ Previously, critics have hesitated to situate Carlos as a colonial subject. Celsa Carmen García Valdés claims that "El gracioso Castaño es el único personaje con cierta individualidad que, con su habla y alusiones a realidades mejicanas, introduce una nota localista en la acción" (196), while Díaz Balsera is only willing to go so far as to acknowledge that "Sor Juana lo vincula metonímicamente al Nuevo Mundo, por medio de su criado mulato" but that ultimately "no se sabe a ciencia cierta quién es"

(67). A close reading of Leonor's loving description of Carlos, however, solidifies that we can no longer assume that Castaño is the only character whose origins definitively lie in the New World.

Carlos's status as colonial outsider makes his overthrowing of Pedro as the chosen suitor by her father a social upset as well as a romantic one. Combined with the publicized humiliation of his accidental betrothal to a male servant, Pedro's embarrassment is complete. Sor Juana has not-so-subtly critiqued the Spanish imperial hierarchy, leaving the noble (in name, if not in action) Spaniard in a state of utter mortification, while her New World characters have the last laugh, both literally and figuratively. Although Ana is the much more manipulative of the Spanish sibling pair, her punishment is far more on par with the mores of the early modern honor code—she must marry the man with whom she has seen and been seen (1.24), thus restoring any dishonour her public actions might have caused. Pedro, on the other hand, must laugh off the humiliating mishap of having mistaken a veiled (male) figure for Leonor, demonstrating, on the one hand, his obvious lack of knowledge about her and her person, and, on the other, the absurdity of the trope that just anyone can move about veiled without being discovered by even their nearest and dearest friends and family (one on which Calderon's version, *Los empeños de un acaso*—along with dozens, if not hundreds, of other Golden Age Plays—relies).⁴ Instead of having trapped his desired wife in both his house and a marriage, both against her will, he loses her to her favoured suitor, Carlos, and his dignity to Castaño.

In her comparison between “los hermanos” (by nationality) Juan Ruíz de Alarcón and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Cristina Simón begins by describing why the *criollo* class of New World citizens had to defend themselves before their peninsular counterparts, whose only difference was marked by birthplace: “la actitud crítica y menospreciadora de los peninsulares hacia los criollos fue el acicate para que estos últimos comenzaron a afirmarse en sí mismos y a contestar

al discurso señalado” (50). She goes on to question why a *criollo* of the period would even want to do so, given their close relationship with the crown, and desire to be recognized as equally important citizens of the Empire:

Dentro de las actitudes y, directa o indirectamente, del discurso criollo de los siglos XVI y XVII, se reivindicaba la hispanidad en toda su pureza y totalidad, lo que exigía ser tratados como iguales a cualquier europeo; además, la élite criolla, en nombre de los conquistadores y aristócratas de quienes decían descender, exigía el acceso a la misma en igualdad de condiciones. (51)

Although Simón signals that some of Alarcón’s work contains traces of his colonial identity and defense of the equality between New- and Old-World elites, it is in Sor Juana that we find much more concrete examples. Simón underscores the introductory *loa* to *El divino Narciso*, the *sarao* and *loa* that were written to be performed with *Casa*, *El villancico* no. 224, the *romances números 5 y 24*, and two sonnets, number 20, dedicated to Sigüenza y Góngora, and number 206, dedicated to la Virgen de Guadalupe (56). She does not include the actual *comedia* or the fact that Castaño is a New World servant, nor the more subtle characterizations of Carlos and Leonor as possible Mexican subjects. By excluding *Casa*, we miss an important part of Sor Juana’s contribution in updating the basic frame of the story to include not only outsiders who represent her and her colonial home, but also ones who triumph over the scheming *madrileños* of higher social standing through perseverance, loyalty, and faith – the very traits that Simón claims that *criollos* believed would win over their peninsular counterparts.

In fact, considering Simón’s list of *criollo* traits, we find even more evidence to link both Carlos and Leonor to the colonial court. Once she has finished lauding his external features, Leonor tells Ana:

Era el talle como suyo,
 que aquel talle y aquel garbo,
 aunque la Naturaleza
 a otro dispusiera darlo,
 sólo le asentara bien
 al espíritu de Carlos:
 que fue de su providencia
 esmero bien acertado,
 dar un cuerpo tan gentil
 a espíritu tan gallardo.
 Gozaba un entendimiento
 tan sutil, tan elevado,
 que la edad de lo entendido
 era un mentís de sus años. (1.427–40)

This defense of Carlos's nobility is an extension of the one that Simón cites from Alarcón's *Las paredes oyen*:

En el hombre no has de ver
 la hermosura o gentileza;
 su hermosura es la nobleza;
 su gentileza, el saber. (cited in Simón 50)

Although Alarcón claims that men need not have the physical manifestations of these qualities, Carlos has both the external and internal expressions of beauty, nobility, courtesy, and

knowledge. Sor Juana is underlining again Carlos's exemplary nature, which would be able to withstand all criticisms, going above and beyond the standards held on both sides of the Atlantic.

Furthermore, as Arrom claims, both colonial writers are not only able to imitate the genres created by their peninsular counterparts, but are also creating something entirely unique: “con la producción teatral de Sor Juana ha sucedido algo análogo a lo que se vio en la de Alarcón: en lo externo, meras imitaciones de los patrones dramáticos imperantes en su tiempo; en el fondo, expresión muy personal de ideas y sentimientos propios” (87). Sor Juana, in particular, is able to best her predecessors, both peninsular and *indiano*. Arrom calls the scene between her *gracioso* Castaño and his suitor Pedro, in which the latter mistakes the former for Leonor “uno de los diálogos de mayor hilaridad de todo el teatro barroco” (86). Carl Good goes so far as to claim Castaño (particularly in this same scene) “emblemate[s] what José Lezama Lima refers to in *La expression americana*, as the ‘fuego originario’ and the ‘puro comenzar’ of the baroque: the transgression of a symmetry that is taken to the liminal point of tension” (37). Sor Juana has created a truly transatlantic *comedia*, one in which New- and Old-World figures are on equal playing ground, eventually allowing for the *criollo galán* to use his harmoniously aligned parts, his yin and yang mixture of both sides, to beat out the scheming—and clearly less desirable—Spaniard, even with all the money and fame that his family's name could bring to the table.

Where Sor Juana's play truly triumphs, however, is in her ability to sneak a *criollo* in among his Spanish counterparts, where he has lain dormant for centuries. Given that Alicia Gaspar de Alba “propose[s] to reconfigure Sor Juana, not as a Hispanic, but as a Chicana lesbian feminist” (47), the repatriation of Leonor by Pérez is even more poignant and highlights the importance of the *criollo* couple's victory over their peninsular antagonists. Carlos's besting of

Pedro is not brought about by steel, but rather through his gentle nature, which wins over Leonor when no local suitor can. Carlos and Leonor's relationship is built on love and mutual respect; their trust for one another is unparalleled in other *comedias de capa y espada*. This can only be accomplished by the introduction of New World/*criollo* values in the *galán*'s personality. Carlos's mix of masculine and feminine features goes beyond the description of his face and demonstrates the superiority his *dramaturga* sees in her compatriots, like that described by Simón. Sor Juana is uniquely positioned as a woman, a colonial subject, and a true genius with the pen to break the conventions of the *comedia* and create something truly inimitable. Gaspar de Alba reminds us that she still comes from a place of privilege, but one that is intersectional and still very much subjugated to the external forces that keep her bound to the patriarchy, and that her identity is that of "the *nueva ciudadana*, a woman of the Americas, product of colonization, employing her agency and her tongue to create an autonomous identity within the confines, and, indeed, through a methodology, of male sovereignty" (47–8). Stroud's assertion that her most closely mirrored character doth protest too much regarding the feminine beauty of Carlos's dual nature might also be a key to understanding the playwright's less-than-straight-forward feelings towards the opposite sex. As Horswell notes, the description cited above of Carlos's enigmatic face "underline[s] Leonor's, and by extension, Sor Juana's desiring of the hybrid" (70).

Her play, created specifically for an audience of colonial and religious powers,⁵ speaks volumes from between its lines. Carlos, representative of the best of both worlds, yet clearly a New World subject, captures the heart of a woman brought up to think peninsular-is-best and shows her that the ways of the Old World are no longer necessary or even beneficial to her. Sor Juana's seemingly conventional *comedia de capa y espada* flips the genre on its head and has the potential to serve as a guide for her viceregal audience: New Spain can be governed, and well, by

Spanish powers, but only if they are willing to recognize that not all subjects are alike, and that this new way of living and being is perhaps not better or worse, only different; a difference that they ignore at the peril of being left behind, a laughing stock, much like Pedro.

Notes:

¹ Although Patricia Kenworthy recognizes that some scholars “have attempted to identify the indigenous elements of Sor Juana’s theater,” her view is that there is little American influence on the dramaturg’s work, but also admits that she is “not interested in attributing any differences in their [Sor Juana and Calderón] works to biographical circumstances” (104). Biographical circumstances, however, are impossible to ignore when you are discussing the work of Sor Juana, whose life experience is so unique for her time that it should be considered.

² As I have argued elsewhere, Sor Juana’s version inverts the plot devices used in traditional *comedias de capa y espada*. Unlike plays such as Calderón’s *La dama duende*, or even the phonemically similar *Los empeños de un acaso*, Sor Juana’s female protagonists start out with the freedom to exist in the public sphere, only to be subsequently entrapped (Cowling, “Beyond the Veil” 133-4).. At the beginning of the play, Ana explains to her servant Celia how she came to know Juan in her brother’s absence: “... así en Madrid me dejó, / donde estando sola yo, / y poder ser vista y ver / me vio don Juan y le vi...” (1.22–5).

³ Taking the metaphor a step further, we could interpret the last four lines as an indication of a mixed-race heritage for Carlos. The idea of his face being marked with “varonil desgarró” that does not allow “hermosura” to take a seat could be taken to mean that his Spanish features are more visibly prominent, preventing his Indigenous background from being obvious. As previously acknowledged, however, censorship and moral codes of the period would have likely prevented this from being visually obvious in peninsular performances of the play.

⁴ Although Calderón’s *Los empeños de un acaso* has frequently been cited as the definitive source text for Sor Juana’s version, there is a third version of this plotline that predates both Sor Juana and Calderón, *Los empeños de un engaño* by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. For more on this timeline and the similarities between the three *comedias* see Erin Alice Cowling, “Recuperating Ruíz de Alarcón.” For this reason, I am calling Calderón’s text a “version” and not a source herein.

⁵ See García Valdés 195.

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Appendix: Image 1



Allegory of America, from New Inventions of Modern Times (Nova Reperta), plate 1 of 19 ca. 1600, Theodore Galle, after Jan van der Straet (also called Stradanus). Reproduced from the Met Museum website under the Met's Open Access API.