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*Festejo de Los Empeños de una Casa: The Negotiation of a Social Contract  
for the American Colonies of Spain*

Dulce María González-Estévez  
Arizona State University

As the new and the old collide in XVII century Méjico, Creole intellectuals reframe themselves in a cast of prideful devotion to their land, even as they remain loyal subjects of Spain. As a dramatist, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651? -1695) reinterprets and appraises the values, norms, and codes imported from Spain and negotiates their place in New Spain's XVII century politics. This ability is particularly well exemplified in the *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa* (1683). The *Festejo* is articulated through ten theatrical pieces that shed light on one another, and construct a vivid picture of the social and political arrangements that underscored the relationships among those who ruled the Mejjican capital, and for whom Sor Juana wrote and directed this *Festejo*<sup>1</sup>. While most critics have focused their studies of the *Festejo* on how the texts interact to form a theatrical spectacle, we would like to focus on the subtext that scaffolds the meaning of each piece. Our study presents a new plane of interpretation diverging from the theme of love, at the literal level, to the one of governance, at the allegorical level.

In the first piece of the *Festejo*, the *loa*, Sor Juana introduces the abstract ideas of Joy (dicha), Fortune (fortuna), Chance (acaso), Merit (mérito), and Diligence (diligencia) providing the cultural value ascribed to those entities at the time the play was written. The first *sainete* complements this group of ideas by adding Love (amor), Respect (respeto), Hope (esperanza), Gifts (obsequios), and Graciousness (fineza) presenting the audience with a set of norms by which the viewers can have access to the social values described in the *loa*. By focusing on these philosophical concepts, we highlight the workings of colonial norms and values as they interact in the form of metaphysical entities in the *loas* and *sainetes* of the *Festejo*. Once these norms and values are identified, we can appraise how these ideas come to life and regulate the social and personal interactions of the comedy and the *sarao* revealing three levels of interpretation: the philosophical plane (values and norms), the amorous plane of a comedy of situations, and the political plane (the governance of the Mejjican nation). This article, first, will focus on important socio-historical aspects that

function as constraints and avenues that time, place, and world view presented to Sor Juana's creative agency. Then we will present our textual analysis of the *Festejo*, highlighting how each text provides the necessary interpretation cues needed to unveil the serious theme of this *comedia palatina*<sup>2</sup>: the harmonious governance of Mejico.

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As a whole, *Festejo de los empeños de una casa* functions as a baroque fiesta. Miguel Roiz, describes this type of celebration as “una serie de acciones... caracterizadas por un alto nivel de participación e interrelaciones sociales, en las que se transmiten significados de diverso tipo (históricos, políticos, sociales, valores...etc.), cumpliendo determinadas finalidades culturales básicas para el grupo (cohesión, solidaridad, etc.)” (102). Olga Martha Doria, confirms that this comedy was written for the Royal accountant Fernando Deza, and performed at his house on October of 1683<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, this particular *Festejo* was meant to honor the viceroys, the counts of Paredes, and to celebrate the public entrance into the city of the archbishop Francisco de Aguar y Sejas.

As Octavio Paz indicates, the comedies that Sor Juana wrote were not meant for the general public but for the courts and aristocracy of her time. Even though we will contextualize this aspect latter, it is important to note now that for the actions and behavior of the characters to be coherent to the audience, they had to be portrayed within the limits presented by the decorum of their social status (433). In this sense, the actions of the characters confirm the social values of the time. In regards to the esthetic manner in which the message was embodied, Eugenia Revueltas comments that the audience who might have attended performances of *Los empeños*, was able to enjoy the riddles and games of the *loa* because they knew the rules of the baroque theater of the time (193). The socio-historical details that contextualize the writing of the *Festejo* will prove to be an important interpretative resource<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, a brief introduction to the historical period that frames the literary work is necessary before we pursue our analysis of the text.

Mabel Moraña estimates that Sor Juana's literary life takes place at a moment of transition, from the consolidation of the Spanish empire to the first ideological suggestions of Méjico as an independent nation (329). The

fragmentation of Colonial and Spanish life became more pronounced as the number of Spanish immigrants to America declined after 1625. Milly Barringer indicates that in the XVI century “Peninsulars engaged in the same range of activities as did creoles but were especially conspicuous in wholesale commerce and high posts in the colonial administration and the ecclesiastical hierarchy” (197). This arrangement changed by the 1600, when creoles increased their economic and political power<sup>5</sup>.

Despite their differences, during periods of high migration from Spain the relationship among the Gachupines and Creoles who controlled the cities grew closer, and the only threat to their daily activities of governing and distributing the wealth of the colonies came from the newly appointed ecclesiastical and political authorities who arrived from Spain. As expected, the allegiance and interests of these former groups were becoming firmly grounded in America. Even though the highest posts of the colonies were assigned to newcomers, and many of the laws, norms, and codes came directly from Spain, day-to-day colonial life operated within a healthy dose of flexibility (Cursio 35). In this context, many festivals, ceremonies, and plays were created to subtly make known the needs and expectations of the governed. For example, in the ceremony at the city’s arch, celebrated to welcome each new viceroy, the leitmotifs were customarily messages that the city council wanted to convey to the newly arriving authorities from Spain, with an emphasis on highly regarded norms and values of the native population<sup>6</sup>. For example, during Sor Juana’s lifetime, “the paintings on the triumphal arches emphasized [the idea] that the generous Christian prince could bring about a new era of prosperity only through hard work...Designers believed that the diligent prince motivated his people to be industrious” (Cursio 27).

Our analysis of the *Festejo* will note that these values would then be transferred to other aspects of the celebrations. The baroque style allowed the artists to hide the requests of the city council in the allegories and copious symbolism characteristic of this style, without making direct requests. The intricate forms of the baroque style became the means for a discrete dialogue between the viceroys and the local authorities. Its complex and innovative elements allowed for private hidden meanings that were concealed to the masses<sup>7</sup>.

The festivities that took place to welcome new viceroys and their families could last for months, and while they stayed in Méjico, many social



events were organized to entertain and honor them. The *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa* is inserted into this cultural and historical context where the well-established Creoles and Gachupines who governed the city sponsored the writing of the *Festejo* to assert their social privilege and, of course, to be entertained. In such cases, the theme and ideas presented in the plays were determined by the interests of hegemonic classes or of classes rising to contest that hegemony (Weiss 91). If at first glance *Los empeños* appears to be an innocent *comedia de enredos* (comedy of situations), where two protagonists fight different forces to secure their love, it is because the social context associated with this type of festivity is being ignored<sup>8</sup>.

Giuseppe Bellini reminds us in 1965 of the lack of articles published regarding the theater written by Sor Juana. He observes that: “el número limitado de estudios que se han dedicado hasta ahora a ese aspecto de la obra de Sor Juana... suelen resultar, muy a menudo, contradictorios en sus respectivas conclusiones (107). Since then, the number of articles pertaining to the study of el *Festejo de los empeños de una casa*, has increased, but not the clarity regarding the theme. Perhaps because most studies focus on: situating the work of Sor Juana within the context of the *Teatro del siglo de oro* (Bellini 1965, Castañeda 1967, Laguerre 1978), the circumstances of the first performance of the *Festejo* (Poot Herrera 2016), the study of *Los empeños de una casa*, without acknowledgement or interpretation of the ancillary texts of the *Festejo* (Chang Rodríguez 1978), or on the technical and performative aspects of the play (Larson 1990, Poot Herrera 1993, González 1999, Hernández 1997, Komorowska 2018). Although Sara Poot Herrera (1993) provides a global theme for the *Festejo* in *Las prendas menores de Los empeños de una casa*, the theme she proposes only expands on one level of interpretation<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, no in-depth study of the allegoric elements presented throughout the texts of the *Festejo* has been written.

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In regard to the author's style, Rocio Olivares Zorrilla challenges critics to "recuperar los sentidos velados por la pátina de los siglos en estas pequeñas piezas teatrales, cuya finalidad decorativa, política y circunstancial queda opacada por el ingenio de su composición filosóficamente calculada" (187). It is in this plane of intelligibility that the discourse of the *Festejo de los empeños de una casa* renders its sweetest fruits. On a philosophical plane, the



comedy symbolizes the metaphysical theme introduced in the *loa*: Sor Juana introduces the abstract ideas of Joy (dicha), Fortune (fortuna), Chance (acaso), Merit (mérito), and Diligence (diligencia). The first *sainete* complements this group of ideas by adding Love (amor), Respect (respeto), Hope (esperanza), Gifts (obsequios), and Graciousness (fineza). All these abstract ideas and the code by which they interact manifest themselves allegorically in the comedy, revealing the values and norms outlined in the *loa*, the *letras*, and the *sainetes*. The organization of the dramatic material allows the supplementary texts to structure the *Festejo* as a whole and to have a decisive effect over its possible levels of interpretation.

The characters and their qualities (in the *loa*, the *sainetes*, and the *letras*) are recognizable to Sor Juana's audience because of their direct relationship to Plato's dialectic method to reach clarity through the abstract realm of ideas<sup>10</sup>. Plato insisted that citizens should use conceptual analysis when making political decisions. "In his political philosophy, the clarification of concepts is thus a preliminary step in evaluating beliefs, and right beliefs, in turn, lead to an answer to the question of the best political order" (Korab 3). Considering this insight, the *Festejo* can be organized in the following manner: the *loa* serves as a preamble to the play and establishes a metaphysical theme developed through the *sainetes*, the *letras*, and the *sarao*, which illustrate the application of the metaphysical concepts to social and individual spheres.

The comedy, *Los empeños de una casa*, is an allegory that helps the audience recognize what is the greatest Joy and the best means to achieve it. The *Festejo* as a whole illustrates how these ideas operate within the bounds of courtly love. At the end of the *Festejo*, the often-overlooked *sarao*, unveils the social utility of the values, codes, and norms exemplified through the other texts. Our strategy to gain more clarity regarding the meaning of *Los empeños* revolves around understanding the imported European values and norms that organized courtly life at the time the *Festejo* was written. Historically, the courts of New Spain were modeled after the courts of Spain; therefore, the new and old-world shared a highly conventionalized set of norms and values that regulated the interactions among natives and newcomers.

When reading Sor Juana, one must consider the dynamics of her social position, the liberties that the baroque style granted her, and the influence of Plato on her generation. Josefina Ludmer insists that, despite her position of subordination and marginality, one must read Sor Juana "for the

ways in which abstract thinking, science, and politics filtered into [her work] through the cracks in the familiar" (86-87). The baroque style and the intended audience of *Los empeños de una casa* pressured Sor Juana to push the limits of her ingenuity and talent to challenge the intellectual abilities of her sophisticated stately public, without offending anyone in her diverse and powerful audience. In the *Festejo*, Sor Juana introduces the spectator to a complex web where ideals, values, codes, and norms, are layered in complimentary texts regulating the outcomes of the comedy. Rodolfo Usigli recognizes this tension in the play and describes the comedy as: "an intrigue of human design—as soon as it is conceived of and connected to the movement of reality by the characters—begins to be controlled by greater powers" (52). Usigli does not specify what those powers might be, but we argue that, in *Los empeños*, the danger of adversity and confusion surfaces when the characters do not adhere to the system of norms and values presented in the supplemental texts.

It is important to emphasize that when Sor Juana directed the *Festejo*: "no había intermedios ni pausas, por lo que todo se escenificaba seguido formando una especie de continuum dramático ilusorio en el que se envolvía al público de principio a fin...El cambio temático loa-comedia-entremés-baile... generaba una especie de unidad anímica, la ilusión colectiva de un todo orgánico muy bien estructurado" (Zugasti 471). In the rest of the paper, we will examine the literary structure that gives unity and meaning to the *Festejo*, and the central philosophical questions that advance the action from beginning to end: 1) what is the greatest *Dicha* (joy) and 2) by what means can it be achieved? This question is first introduced when in the *loa* Merit states:

Sonoro acento que llamas,  
 pause tu canora voz,  
 pues si el asunto es, cuál sea  
 de las dichas la mayor,  
 y a quién debe atribuirse. (de la Cruz 627)

In the *Festejo* joy is equated with love that is reciprocated, but Supreme Joy (always written with a capital letter in the play) could only be achieved by receiving the esteem of the viceroys.

The *Festejo* starts with a *loa* which according to Amalia Iniesta, “comprende problemáticas y asuntos que vienen forzados por la época, puede decirse que su característica principal es el de ser un teatro de ideas, un teatro de tesis, fundamentalmente, un ámbito de discusión de las ideas en el que se obligaba a repensar infinitud de cuestiones” (272). Por su parte, Celsa García Valdez suggests that *loas* act as supplementary texts that equip the audience to understand the main text, “introduciendo y explicando en la loa el argumento del auto, por lo que se da entre las dos piezas una dependencia” (209). This is true in *Los empeños*, where the *loa* offers a representation of the world of ideas that will take human form in the comedy.

The abstract entities in Sor Juana’s *loa* operate as delineated in Plato’s political philosophy where “the best, rational and righteous, political order... leads to a harmonious unity of society and allows each of its parts to flourish, but not at the expense of others” (Korab 1). Because the key to the implementation of this order according to Plato is virtue, we will see how the structure of the play moves us to explore virtuous values interacting among themselves in the form of metaphysical entities, and then transcending the world of ideas as they regulate the social and personal interactions of the comedy.

The author uses the *loa* and the *primer sainete* as a form of conceptual exploration where notions of virtue are clarified and defined. The crisis in the comedy was announced in the *loa*. The inability of the entities to decide who deserves the ultimate Joy (to love and be loved) makes them resort to the judgment of a sublime being, Joy itself. In the *loa*, Joy makes it clear that true Joy is an autonomous entity, which operates based on its designs. However, Sor Juana cleverly makes a distinction between “vulgares dichas” and “Dichas”, the joy of obtaining the favor of the Viceroy is expressed with capital letters in the following verse of the *loa*, and throughout the *Festejo*:

Y alegres digamos  
a su hermosa vista:  
Bien venida sea  
tan sagrada Dicha,  
que la Dicha siempre  
es muy bien venida. (634)

The favor of the viceroys is the only type of Joy that Diligence and Merit cannot earn. But as we will latter observe, in any other instance Diligence and Merit can work together to keep Chance and Luck at bay<sup>11</sup>.

This issue comes allegorically to life in the conflict that fuels the dramatic action: finding love while retaining Honor by following the rules of courtly love. In the comedy, the characters want to achieve the ultimate Joy of loving and being loved. The conflict arises because some lovers are contending for the favor of someone who does not reciprocate their love and are succumbing to the temptation of relying on Luck and Chance to win the day. Only the main characters, Leonor and Carlos, have mutual feelings for each other, but the characteristics of the comedy of situations, provide a setting where confusion, due to lack of light, prevents the characters from seeing clearly. This situation creates an unruly world that amuses the audience.

Introduction of Ideas	Representation of Ideas	Reinforcement of Ideas
1. Loa (virtues)		
		2. Primera letra (Lysi) “Mentales víctimas son”
	3. Primera jornada	
		4. Segunda letra (Lysi) “Es razón que te alabes”
5. Primer Sainete (norms)		
	6. Segunda jornada	
		7. Tercera letra (Josef) “Hijo de Marte y Venus que dueño te introduces”
8. Segundo Sainete (metatheatre)		
	9. Tercera Jornada	
10. Sarao - The political implications of the ideas		

Table 1. Text Distribution

The fact that the characters perceive honor as their greatest social asset forces them, by the end of the comedy, to see past their emotions and protect it. This allows the comedy to close with the weddings of Ana and

Leonor. In this first level of interpretation, the creativity of Sor Juana produces comic situations that entertain the audience. If our analysis considered only the comedy *Los empeños de una casa*, then we could deem the play to be a *comedia de enredos* or a *comedia palatina cómica*<sup>12</sup>. However, the spectators and readers of the *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa* must realize that serious statements about governance are being made. To enter the political plane of interpretation one must follow an intricate path set forth by the playwright and understand the physical and logical distribution of the texts of the *Festejo* (see table 1).

During the baroque period, people tried to bring order into a chaotic world by setting rules and codes for every aspect of social interaction. For example, both Joy and Honor were values that could be attained by following the code of courtly love. In the *Sainete primero de palacio* the norms of courtly love are reviewed providing a code that can regulate the social interaction in the three jornadas.

Sor Juana implies the necessity of a code to regulate interactions when in the *loa* the entities compete to determine which one is better positioned to bring forth Joy. The entity of Music sets the stage in the following manner:

Siendo el asunto a quién puede  
atribuirse mejor  
si al gusto de la Fineza  
o del Mérito al sudor  
venid todos venid... (627)

The characters that compete in the *loa* are Merit, Diligence, Fortune, and Luck. Even though the concept of *Fineza* is mentioned in the *loa*, its definition and purpose are not fully entertained until the *Sainete primero de palacio*, which takes place after the first act of the comedy. In the *sainete*, *ineza* contends with Love, Respect, Gifts, and Hope for the disdain of the ladies of the court.

The prevalence of the world of ideas and the personification of these ideas is more explicit in the *sainete* than in the *loa*. The Alcalde states:

Metafísica es del gusto  
sacarlos a plaza hoy,

que aquí los mejores entes  
los metafísicos son.  
Vayan saliendo a la plaza,  
porque aunque invisibles son,  
han de parecer reales,  
aunque le pese a Platón. (653)

The concept of courtly love originated during the medieval period and introduced the idea that a person's Honor is not simply linked to nobility titles or riches. In this conception of the world, a person's soul can reveal merits and virtues that assert the honor of the individual. For this reason, a man could attain the stature of a perfect knight by serving his lady with devotion and without expecting any favors from her. At the same time, a Lady could show her worth by preserving her honor. Although problematic for the modern reader in many respects, these ideas set the stage for a more democratic view of mankind and established a set of rules by which a common person could achieve social value. The rules that developed from such a worldview became known as the code of courtly love.

In the first *sainete*, where a contest for the disdain of the ladies of the palace is set forth, the code of courtly love is reviewed. The first rule to which attention is called is that of rejection: "Del desprecio de las Damas, / plenipotenciario soy; / y del favor no, porque / en Palacio no hay favor" (653). Sor Juana is referring in this instance to a situation that she knows firsthand, "*los galanteos de palacio*" as she was at one point one of these court ladies whose "game was reduced to defending [their] modesty, a dangerous game because it consists of not refusing completely, but rather in refusing to stir up the fire" (Paz, *Juana Ramírez* 87). This is expressed in the *sainete* the following way: "Andad, andad adentro; / porque las Damas / llegan hasta las deudas, / no hasta las pagas" (654). In this context, to snub a lover meant to keep one's honor intact. Doña Ana expresses this in the first act as she plans to trick Don Carlos into falling in love with her by taking advantage of the fact that, by chance, her beloved one is seeking refuge at her house. Doña Ana conjectures:

Pues amparándole aquí  
con generosas caricias,  
cubriré lo enamorada

con vistos de compasiva;  
y sin ajar la altivez  
en mi decoro es precisa,  
podré sin rendirme yo,  
obligarle a que se rinda. (644)

Her actions are not proper and do not conform to the norms outlined in the *loa* and the *sainetes*, so the audience can safely anticipate that she will not achieve true reciprocated love. According to Octavio Paz, “the code of laws pertaining to manners is intimately tied to the code of laws of gallantry; both are attempts to regulate [passions], in the closed space of the palace” (Paz, *Juana Ramírez* 82). Doña Ana is overrun by her passion and shows a complete disregard for her honor. It is only due to the *fineza* of Don Carlos that her honor is protected.

The next rule that is presented in the *sainete* is selfless love. In the *sainete*, the entity of Love cannot win the prize because it came “seeking favor” (654), but *Fineza* (graciousness), wins the day. *Fineza* is described by negation in the following way:

Voz mentís en lo propuesto:  
que si amarais por amar,  
aun siendo el premio el desprecio,  
no lo quisierais, siquiera  
por tener nombre de premio.  
Demás que yo conozco,  
en las señas os lo veo,  
que vos no sois la Fineza. (655)

The Alcalde then describes courtly love by stating:

El amante verdadero  
ha de tener de lo amado  
tan soberano concepto,  
que ha de pensar que no alcanza  
su amor al merecimiento  
de la bealdad a quien sirve;  
y aunque ame con extremo,



ha de pensar siempre que es  
su amor, menor que el objeto,  
y confesar que no paga  
con todos los remordimientos;  
que lo fino del amor  
está en no mostrar el serlo. (655)

This *sainete* is immediately followed by the second act. At this point it might be helpful to add a table to visualize the relationship between the characters in the comedy and the entities in the *loa* (see table 2 below).

Entities in the Loa	Characters in the comedy
Joy	Doña Leonor
Fortune	Don Pedro
Chance	Doña Ana
Merit	Don Carlos
Diligence	Don Juan

Table 2. Entity and Character Relationship

The connection between the values of the *loa*, and the norms of the *primer sainete* is alluded to in the comment of Don Carlos as he describes the not so honorable behavior of Doña Ana, who, as mentioned before, by chance was able to host him at her house:

Discreta y lisonjera,  
alabándome, añadió  
cosas que, a ser vano yo,  
a otro afecto atribuyera  
pero son quimeras vanas  
de jóvenes altiveces;  
que en mirándolas corteses  
luego las juzgan livianas. (657)

Also, the role of luck and its relationship to Don Pedro, as well as his lack of adherence to the code of courtly love, is expressed as Doña Leonor pleads with him in the following verses:

Y sea que ya que veis  
que la fortuna me postra  
.....  
y puesto que en el estado  
que veis que tienen mis cosas,  
tratarme de vuestro amor  
es una acción tan impropia,  
que ni es bien decirlo vos  
ni justo que yo lo oiga. (662)

The idea of Fortune and “su condición veleidosa, forma parte de la ideología de su tiempo y ...en los aspectos de la vida social, política, económica, Fortuna cambia y decide destino y poco o nada puede hacer el hombre frente a ella...” (Revueltas 198). In the *loa*, Sor Juana clearly expresses the dangers of allowing Fortune and Luck by describing their role in deciding the fate of Dario, Tamorlyn, Cesar, Teseo, Ulises, Troya, etc. In the comedy fortune and luck do not win the day, for virtue represented by diligence and merit can counteract their power. The political implications of these verses are clear<sup>13</sup>.

According to the rules outlined in the *primer sainete*, Don Pedro and Doña Ana break the code of courtly love because they are motivated by their passions and allow Chance (Doña Ana) and Fortune (Don Pedro) to play a role in their affairs. In this regard he comments: “es la pena más severa / que puede dar el amor / la carencia del favor” (664). As Don Pedro, Doña Ana admits that her behavior is unacceptable, but emotions have taken over and she concludes:” ¿Pues no he de llorar / ¡hay infeliz de mí! Cuando / conozco que estoy errando / y no me puedo enmendar?” (639). In contrast, the graciousness and merits of Don Carlos conquer the love of Leonor. This is clear when Don Carlos comments:

¿No soy yo quien de Leonor  
la bealdad idolatrando,

la solícite tan fino,  
la serví tan recatado,  
que en premio de mis finezas  
conseguí favores tantos. (667)

Furthermore, both protagonists are praised for their rational thinking. Leonor describes Don Carlos in the first act by stating:

Gozaba un entendimiento  
tan sutil, tan elevado  
.....  
tan humilde en los afectos,  
tan tierno en los agasajos,  
tan fino en las persuaciones,  
tan apacible en el trato...  
en los desdenes sufrido,  
en los favores callado,  
en los peligros resuelto,  
y prudente en los acasos. (642)

In contrast to Don Juan and Doña Ana, the main characters (Doña Leonor and Don Carlos) submit their passions to reason and do not entrust their future to luck or chance.

In the third act, the merits of Don Carlos allow him to overcome all the obstacles his love faces and provide him with the joy of marrying Doña Leonor. At the same time, the diligence of Don Juan earns him the respect and hand of Doña Ana. The characters that are associated with the entity of Chance (Doña Ana) and Luck (Don Pedro) keep their honor but do not achieve the joy of obtaining the prize they were aiming for: reciprocal love. By the end of the comedy, order prevails over chaos by having the characters adhere to “una filosofía del amor, [the code of courtly love], que, al mismo tiempo, resulta así enriquecida y precisada” (Parker 383). So far, we have discussed the place of virtues and norms in *Los empeños*, but as we will see, these intricate norms and values of social life have precise political implications.

María Pérez indicates that Sor Juana’s plays “en su aspecto formal...son un eco de las que se escribían en España, pero el fondo de estas

obras refleja ya el germen de lo criollo...[pues] llevaba a la escena el sentir de la gente de su tiempo, su psicología [y] sus costumbres” (59). The sense of patriotic pride in Méjico, described by Perez<sup>14</sup> is clearly expressed in the *sarao* that closes the *Festejo*. A close reading of the texts as a unified discourse suggests a direct relationship between the characters of the comedy, the values of the *loa*, the norms of the first *sainete*, and their political implication for the *sarao* (see table 3).

LOA Values	COMEDY Characters	SAINETE Adherence to code of courtly love?	SARAO Letras
Joy	Doña Leonor	Yes. Her love represents the greatest Joy.	Lysi Revealed as Supreme Joy
Fortune	Don Pedro	No. Does not achieve his love	
Chance	Doña Ana	No. Marries to save her honor, but not the person she loves.	
Merit	Don Carlos	Yes. Deserves love due to merit, and achieves the greatest Joy of loving and being loved.	Viceroy's merit expressed
Diligence	Don Juan	Yes. Deserves love due to graciousness, and marries the person he loves.	Viceroy and Notables of the city
		The first sainete contenders: Love (amor), Respect (respeto), Hope (esperanza), Gifts (obsequios), and Graciousness (fineza).	Mejican nation exhibits the greatest fineza

Table 3. Relationship Among Characters, Values, Norms, and Political Implications

Milly S. Barranger states that “at the end of almost any comedy, the life force is ordinarily celebrated in a wedding, a dance, or a banquet symbolizing the harmony and reconciliation of opposing forces” (106). This celebration is announced in the *loa*, by the entity Music who states: “!Y sea en su Casa / porque eternal viva, / como la nobleza, / vinculo la Dicha!” (636). The celebration that restores order in the comedy is repeated for the audience in the merriment of the *sarao*, which brings about our third level of interpretation. In this celebration, the plane is leveled to allow for all governing parties to share power in a relationship of mutual respect and love.

María Pérez indicates that throughout the play, the author “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). The interpretation of the verse cited by Pérez is incorrect because it does not take into consideration specific stylistic conventions of the time and contradicts the norms and values outlined in the rest of the play<sup>15</sup>. When we read this comment, in light of our study about the literary function of the *loa* and the *sarao*, we can notice that this situation of dominance goes against good judgment, when trying to achieve the best political order outlined by Plato. In *Los empeños*, the audience is reminded that justice has an intimate relationship with virtue and goodness. Following Plato’s ideas, “Justice...if rightly understood is not to the exclusive advantage of any of the city’s factions, but is concerned with the common good of the whole political community, and is to the advantage of everyone [for] it provides the city with a sense of unity, and thus, is a basic condition for its health” (Korab 5). If indeed “in comedy the playwright examines the social world, social values, and people as social beings” (Barringer 106), there must be more to this *Festejo* than the amusing situations that provoked laughter in the three acts of the comedy.

We have contended that in *Los empeños*, Sor Juana calls for reason and moderation to establish an equilibrium among the very distinct players that live in the courts of the New World. At stake here is the well-being and happiness of the “Mejican nation” (106). Therefore, the *Festejo*’s political nuances are a discreet and diplomatic way of allowing the natives to maintain a dignified position while the new viceroys retain sovereignty. In the realm of ideas and values, both groups can see themselves reflected in the *Festejo*: one for its graciousness (*finezas*) and the other one for its merits (*mérito*).

The merits of the viceroys are expressed in the *loa*, the *letras*, and the *sarao*. Sor Juana's articulation of these characteristics serves artistic and political purposes.

In the *loa*, the couples' arrival is associated with the Joy of the audience when the entity: *Dicha*, welcomes the personification of Joy in the viceroys and exclaims:

la venida dichosa  
de la Excelsa María  
y del Invicto Cerda,  
que eternos duren y dichosos vivan.

Ved si a Dicha tan grande  
como gozáis, podría  
Diligencia ni Acaso,  
Mérito ni Fortuna, conseguirla. (634)

In this verse the logic of courtly love, as expressed in the *primer sainete*, is introduced, for it is clear that the Joy of having the affections of the viceroys is not deserved. Music reiterates this idea declaring: "Y así, pues pretendéis / a alguno atribuirle, / sólo atribuirse debe / tanta ventura a Su Grandeza misma" (634). In the same *loa*, *Mérito* indicates the attitude that the welcoming nation must have, by stating:

Y pues esta casa,  
a quien iluminan  
tres Soles con rayos,  
con Alba con risa,  
no ha sabido cómo  
festejar su Dicha  
si no es con mostrarse  
de ella agradecida. (635)

From this perspective, the word house can be interpreted in three ways: as the house of Don Fernando Deza (where the representation is taking place), the house of Don Pedro (in the comedy), or as a metaphor for the Mejjican nation. It could be reasoned that if in the comedy Leonor represents the

entity of joy, then, Leonor is also representing Lysi/María who represents a higher Joy. This is confirmed when in the second act Carlos compares her beauty to the sun when he says to Castaño: “¿si en belleza es Sol Leonor, / para qué afeites quería? (658). This is the same metaphor the playwright has used before to allude to Lysi in the letras when she declares: Bellísima María, /a cuyo Sol radiante, / del otro Sol se ocultan / los rayos materiales” (652).

Another telling word in the title is the word “empeños.” In the comedy, the word “empeños” carries the meaning of hard work or persistency during trials. The word is used for example, when Leonor describes the way she was perceived by her peers: llegó la superstición / popular a empeño tanto, /que ya adoraban deidad /el ídolo que formaron” (641). In the third act Don Rodrigo uses the word when confronting Don Carlos by stating: “Teneos, Don Carlos, y sosegaos,/ porque ya todo el empeño/ está ajustado” (696). If the meaning of the word empeños in the *loa* is to be derived by the way this word is used in the comedy, and the contents of the *sarao* are studied as an integral part of the *Festejo*, one can consider that the title *Los empeños de una casa* can be alluding to the Mejjican nation. That would be the “casa” that the viceroys have come to govern with diligence. According to the concept of good governance that was prevalent at the time of Sor Juana, a viceroy who is, by birth, worthy of governing, but is also diligent, is considered to meet the qualifications to merit his post. At the time the comedy was presented, the Viceroys had been governing Méjico for about three years, and their diligence in governing is noted in the *Festejo*.

*Los empeños de una casa* is an interesting title when one considers that the *Festejo* was commissioned by the powerful cabildo of Méjico City to entertain the Archbishop and the Viceroys. Linda Cursio indicates that many Spaniards who were sent to the colonies believed “that by virtue of their moral and racial superiority, they deserved to rule” (3). However, the politics of Méjico city had been affected by the fear of civil unrest. The city had major violent struggles from 1608 to 1612, and in 1665, 1696, and 1701” (5). For this reason, the Gachupines and Creoles in positions of power had to work together with the authorities sent from Spain and be diligent and disciplined to maintain control. This historical contextualization is important to interpret the *Festejo* as a unit from which more meaning is derived when we include all the peripheral texts in our analysis.



From a political perspective, the values brought to America by representatives of the crown (those abstract values introduced in the *loa* and the *sainetes*) are utilized by Sor Juana to dignify the position of those born in the new world. In the comedy, the motives for the protagonists' behavior are established by the code of courtly love. That code is simply the outward expression of social values that exist in the realm of ideas, and are not readily affected by time and space. These values can help create norms that apply in Spain and Méjico and can set the parameters for a fruitful relationship between the two nations. Some of those social values are eloquently announced in the *loa* that precedes the *primera jornada*, which in turn serves to bring to life the social norms of the court.

The *primer sainete* (first farce) provides many of the social norms that complement the values given in the *loa*. The *sainete* is in turn followed by the *segunda jornada*, which again attempts to provide a mirror that reflects the outcome of following, or not following, the norms reviewed in the *primer sainete*. The two "letras" that are inserted after the *loa* and the *primer sainete* respectively, honor the wife of the viceroy and their son. Miguel Zugasti comments that in these "la autora rinde una pleitesía total a la belleza y virtudes de madre e hijo, inalcanzables para la mayoría de los mortales" (474). These letters are customary of the times, but also confirm the status and inherent merits of the royal family as a unit, for it was not proper at the time for a woman to address the Viceroy directly.

In this reading of the *Festejo*, the *segundo sainete* highlights the performativity of the staged world by commenting on current theater events and the comedy itself. This break foretells the illusion that the comedy represents. The characters in that text are just reflections on a mirror, and the interaction of Castaño with the audience reminds them that they are experiencing a recreation of reality structured by ideas and words. This is clear when the character directs this comment to the audience:

Dama habrá en el auditorio  
que diga a su compañera:  
"Mariquita, aqueste bobo  
al tapado representa."  
Pues atención, mis señoras,  
que es paso de la comedia;  
no piensen que son embustes

fraguados acá en mi idea,  
que no quiero engañarlas,  
ni menos a Vuexcelencia. (685)

Sor Juana does not use this recourse with the objectives of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Her technique is not used to make the audience socially aware, but to make them differentiate between the world of ideas and the Real-world. A world that must align with universal values and norms to regulate social interaction and avoid chaos and social unrest. Social relations outside of those values and norms are presented as chaotic and dangerous.

The multifaceted identity of the native ruling class was given expression in Sor Juana's work. In the *sarao*, the reader can observe how recognized authorities were "working to establish their own identity as uniquely rooted in the capital and New Spain itself rather than in Spain" (Cursio 11). One can sense the pride the poet has in the double inheritance of the birthing nation as she describes la celestina mestiza as:

acabada a retazos,  
y si le faltó traza, tuvo trazos,  
y con diverso genio  
se formó de un trapiche y de un ingenio.  
Y en fin en su poesía,  
por lo bueno lo malo se suplía. (676)

This pride does not prevent her from seeing that there is a clear distinction between what, in the *sarao*, she calls the Spaniards and the Mejjicans. This is clear as she chooses to call the final piece, *Sarao de cuatro naciones*. The four nations are represented by their subjects: Spaniards, Blacks, Italians and Mejjicans. The celebration of the *sarao*, does not escape the internal logic of the *Festejo*. In the *sarao*, all the philosophical questions and social situations incorporated in the *Festejo* find their resolution, and the celebration ensues, for society has achieved an equilibrium based on the adherence to clear social values and norms.

The *sarao* starts by announcing a war between love and obligation to conquer the love of the viceroys. Sor Juana notes:

Hoy la Obligación

y el Amor se ven disputar valientes  
la lid más cortés.  
De todos los triunfos  
es éste al revés;  
pues aquí el rendido  
el vencedor es. (700)

In the next verses she asserts: “La cuestión es: cuál / podrá merecer / del excelso Cerda / los invictos pies” (701). She also clarifies that in the realm of ideas the incarnated virtue of the royal family has been described before, but now they are here as real representatives of Merit and Joy. Sor Juana stresses: “porque en tanta fabulosa / deidad de la antigüedad / allá se expresa entre sombras / lo que entre luces acá” (701).

Even though the viceroys are, by power and hierarchy, meritorious and worthy to be loved and deserve to govern over the Mejjican nation (according to the values described the *loa*), the biggest *fineza*, as it is described in the *primer sainete* of the *Festejo*, is that exhibited by the Mejjicans, as they willingly love the monarchs without expectations of being loved in return. The *first sainete* presents the contenders: Love (amor), Respect (respeto), Hope (esperanza), Gifts (obsequios), and Graciousness (fineza), and the reason why they cannot achieve Joy:

AMOR  
Verdad es lo que dices:  
pues aunque amo,  
el Amor es obsequio,  
mas no contrato.  
OBSEQUIO  
Ni tampoco el Obsequio;  
porque en Palacio,  
con que servir lo dejen,  
queda pagado.  
RESPETO  
Ni tampoco el Respeto  
algo merece;  
que a ninguno le pagan  
lo que se debe.

FINEZA

La Fineza tampoco;  
porque, buen visto,  
no halla en lo obligatorio  
lugar lo fino.

ESPERANZA

Yo, pues nada merezco  
siendo Esperanza,  
de hoy más llamarme quiero  
Desesperada. (656)

By opposition we find that the most meritorious action according to the code of courtly love is to love, serve and give without expecting anything in return.

The following verses in the *sarao*, indicate that Cerda deserved by merit and gained by diligence the right to govern when *Diligencia* proclaims: “Y a su invicto esposo, / que supo feliz / tanto merecer / como conseguir” (703). This phrase is ambivalent since she could be referring to the love of María/Lysi or his right to administer the “Mejican nation”. The following verse sheds light over this issue: “A estas tres deidades, / alegres rendid / de América ufana / la altiva cerviz” (703). But America must give herself under the internal logic of the *Festejo*, abiding by, the values stated in the *primer sainete*, following the code of courtly love. In this regard, the *coro* describes the battle between Obligation and Love as follows:

La Obligación, por precisa,  
dice que no es bien parezca  
que se ejecuta de gracia  
lo que se tiene por deuda.  
El Amor, más cortesano  
dice que, cuando así sea,  
puede él hacer voluntario  
lo que la Obligación fuerza.  
Replica la Obligación  
que es menester que se entienda  
que se paga por tributo  
y no se da por ofrenda.  
Mejor lógico el Amor,

dice que, en una acción mesma,  
hace dádiva la paga  
el afecto de la entrega. (703)

The logic set forth in the *loa* and the *primer sainete* has its echoes in the previous verses and the logical articulation of the hope for the relationship between the two nations is expressed by the choro:

vence el Amor y vencida  
la Obligación se confiesa  
(que rendirse de un cariño,  
es muy airosa bajeza),  
bien que, felizmente unidos,  
con igual correspondencia,  
pagan, como que no dan;  
dan, como si no debieran. (703)

The wedding of Leonor and Carlos becomes an image of the union of the nations that is celebrated in the *sarao*.

By adhering to the code of courtly love, Mejjicans become worthy of the favor of the viceroys. Balancing the worth of both groups creates a space for social cohesiveness and expresses Sor Juana's belief in the superiority of the world of ideas and their usefulness in promoting unity among those who had prominent positions in Méjico.

Once unity prevails, the best way to secure joy is by avoiding the chaotic environment where luck and chance are allowed to determine the outcome of events. Therefore, Sor Juana provides a recipe to neutralize them: while Chance can be sidetracked by prevention according to what Diligence has to say in the following verse: "Muchas veces hemos visto/ que puede la prevención/ quitar el daño al Acaso" (628), luck cannot win over the union of Diligence and Merit, as it is reported by *Diligencia* in rhythmic verse:

pero supuesto que ahora  
estamos juntos los dos,  
pues el Mérito eres tú  
y la Diligencia yo,  
no hay que temer competencias

de Fortuna. (628)

The old and the new world can maintain their unity and avoid chaos by regulating their relationship by what Octavio Paz calls the laws of gallantry (82). It is clear that Sor Juana is upholding the values of her times and used the *loa*, the *letras*, the *sainetes*, and the comedy to set a stage where the merit of the royal family is recognized, but the diligence of the notables of the city is used to balance their power by highlighting the benefits of ruling in one accord.

In the beginning, it was affirmed that all the elements of the play are unified under the same central philosophic questions: what is the greatest Joy, and by what means can it be achieved? It was also argued that the values and norms of the time were presented throughout the text. The *loa* expresses the value of Joy as being sovereign and associates the coming of the viceroys with the supreme Joy. The comedy confirms that merit, represented by Don Carlos, deserves the Joy of reciprocal love. The first farce states that the utmost graciousness, according to the code of courtly love, is to love without expecting anything in return. This love is expressed by Don Juan, whose behavior is described by Doña Ana in the following manner: “Tras mí, como sabes, vino / amante y fino Don Juan, / quitándose de galán / lo que se añade de fino” (638). In the internal logic of the play, the letters present evidence of the merit of the viceroys, and finally, to enter into the merriment of the *sarao*, passions must be dominated by reason and troubles resolved in unity by diligence and merit.

Aurelio González indicates that in the *sarao*, “está presente la idea del Nuevo y el Viejo Mundo como las dos partes del gran modelo imperial español” (124). The detailed description of the union of the viceroys is the model of a relationship where two become one. From an artistic perspective, Mabel Moraña affirms that “quizá la paradoja principal del Barroco sea justamente la de construir a la vez una totalidad diferenciada, sólida y coherente, y un cuerpo que revela las líneas de fracción por las que habría de esconderse la propia cosmovisión que lo sostiene” (328). Sor Juana presents with this *Festejo* a logical pathway that allows Creoles the possibility of being valued as citizens of the Mejican nation, not just subjects of Spain. The coro expresses the love and strong bond between the royal couple by stating: “los dos amantes esposos, que en tálamo conyugal/ hacen la igualdad unión/ y la

unión identidad” (701). Expressing at the same time the bond under which Mejico should be governed.

Through the ideas presented in this *Festejo*, Mejjicans have become worthy of the greatest Joy: deserving the love and respect of the viceroys. They have demonstrated that they are capable of the greatest *fineza* (graciousness): which is described in the *loa* and the *sainetes*, represented in the comedy, and reinforced in the *sarao*. This, of course, is not done lightly but is the consequence of thoughtful consideration as this is clearly stated by the poet in one of the letras that reads: “mentales victimas son/ las que ante tu trono yacen” (636). If with the wedding of Leonor and Carlos the perfect union of two individuals is celebrated, in the *sarao* it is evident that the social expectations of the time arouse tensions that at the end of the day need to be resolved to restore unity.

Artistically, the *Festejo* is a clear example of the “considerable esfuerzo por rescatar la imagen del espectáculo integral, esto es, la fiesta teatral barroca en toda su esencia, mosaico de piezas cortas que acompañan una larga” (Zugasti 468). Sociologically, *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa* is an illustration of the value of the Baroque style in the construction of a social contract for the American colonies of Spain. Sor Juana undoubtedly played many parts in her time. Her sociological intuition is expressed in this *Festejo* as it reveals, “la existencia de una voluntad de exploración crítico-ideológica de los discursos que legitiman el status quo y de las bases reales de la autoridad y sus relaciones con el poder” (Moraña 329).

On many occasions, plays have been equated with mirrors in which life reflections are meaningfully organized (Barringer 14). Dramas allow spectators to view life from a different perspective, and in some instances, to examine situations from many angles. Demonstrating that society is an intricate organism that is structured by ideas was one of Sor Juana’s techniques for imprinting her worldview upon her work. Nevertheless, the social intricacy of 17th century New Spain and the complexity of thought characteristic of the stylistic tendencies of Sor Juana’s time obscure the structuring theme of her celebrated *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa* (*House of trials*). With this work we hope to have elucidated some of the densities of this theatrical production, and the underlying political ideas that are expressed and advanced through often overlooked complimentary texts.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The work was published for the first time in Sevilla in 1692. Regarding that printing, Vidal observes: en el índice del volumen aparecen los títulos de las piezas menores que integran todo el Festejo, aunque se recogen linealmente y no en el orden intercalado con el que aparecen en los interiores del volumen:

**Loa** de la Comedia: Los empeños de una casa [1692: 450]

**Letra**, que empieza: Divina Lysi permite; y se **cantó antes de la comedia** [1692: 460]

**Letra**, que se cantó después de la primera Jornada, y empieza:  
Bellísima María [1692: 478]

**Primero Sainete** de Palacio [1692: 479]

**Letra**, que empieza: Tierno pimpllo hermoso, y se cantó al final de la  
**segunda Jornada** [1692: 499]

**Sainete segundo** [1692: 500]

**Sarao** fin de la Comedia [1692: 526]

Podría decirse que el orden en el interior del volumen apunta, efectivamente, hacia la concepción del Festejo como un conjunto. (Vidal 61)

<sup>2</sup> En cuanto a su clasificación, podemos incluir esta obra del teatro profano escrito por Sor Juana dentro de las comedias palatinas. Siguiendo los planteamientos de Miguel Zugasti en el artículo *Comedia palatina cómica y comedia palatina seria en el Siglo de Oro* (2003), observamos que la obra tiene lugar en un clima de fantasía cortesana, se opaca el plano temporal y espacial, se abordan temas de buen gobierno de forma indirecta, los personajes pertenecen a la realeza y a las personas de otros estamentos sociales con las que éstas interactuaban, el espacio escénico es cortesano, se mantiene la unidad de acción, el enredo es el elemento principal y el objeto estético confiere unidad dramática entre las piezas.

<sup>3</sup> She reports: “en su Diario, Antonio de Robles escribió la siguiente entrada el día correspondiente de octubre de 1683: ‘Lunes 4, día de nuestro padre san Francisco, hizo su entrada pública el señor arzobispo por el arco; asistieron los virreyes en casa del contador de tributos D. Fernando Deza’” (Doria cites Robles, 169). The controversial aspects of the specific dates when this Festejo was performed for the first time are explored in depth by Sarah Poot Herrera (2016). For our purposes, we agree with the idea that the style of the 10 theatrical pieces and their discursive unity prove that they were conceived to be read and represented as a cohesive whole (Poot Herrera 108).

<sup>4</sup> The contextualization that follows is an attempt to situate the social constraints that time, place, and world view placed on Sor Juana’s writing. Insufficient as our efforts might be in trying to align and place the *Festejo de Los empeños de una casa*, within the discourse of its time, and even more, within the author’s intent, those

constraints, form the important safety railings that allow critics to argue for certain interpretations while inhibiting others.

<sup>5</sup> Still, “although the rivalry between Peninsular and Creoles was an inherent result of colonial status... during periods of increased immigration when new arrivals actively sought to assert their metropolitan superiority, threatened Creoles and long-established Peninsulars usually acted in concert to protect their existing advantages” (Burkholder 198).

<sup>6</sup> In these public ceremonies, “the viceroy swore to defend the city and its traditional rights and to govern justly... In return, the councilmen gave him the gold key, the symbol of the submission of municipal authority to royal will... With these oaths, the viceroy signed in essence a social contract... to govern within the expectations of the Church and political institutions of the capital” (Cursio 21).

<sup>7</sup> “In 1680, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote in her description of the cathedral arch: ...It was nothing less than a work consecrated to such a fine prince, the inscriptions impressed the knowledgeable as the colors impacted the eyes of the common person and [garnered] the cordial love and respect of all” (Cursio cites de la Cruz, 22).

<sup>8</sup> As suggested by Emil Volek, “leídos con cuidado y en sus contextos..., los textos, y en especial aquellos ‘menos vistosos’, nos ofrecen muchos detalles útiles y aun sorprendentes, que permiten conectarlos con ciertas circunstancias históricas o personales y, en vista de estos contextos, entender mejor, o hasta nuevamente, aspectos importantes tanto de la obra como de la vida de la poetisa” (27).

<sup>9</sup> Poot Herrera plantea lo siguiente: “En las piezas menores de *Los empeños de una casa*, de la loa al sarao, Sor Juana muestra su agradecimiento hacia los virreyes -su ‘familia’, su ‘casa’- y les da en prenda este juguete teatral, envuelto en voces de colores festivos...” (267).

<sup>10</sup> W. J. Korab-Karpowicz concludes, “the philosophy of Plato is marked by the usage of dialectic, a method of discussion involving ever more profound insights into the nature of reality, and by cognitive optimism, a belief in the capacity of the human mind to attain the truth and to use this truth for the rational and virtuous ordering of human affairs (1).

<sup>11</sup> Let us remember that, as stated previously, during Sor Juana’s lifetime, “the paintings on the triumphal arches emphasized [the idea] that the generous Christian prince could bring about a new era of prosperity only through hard work... Designers believed that the diligent prince motivated his people to be industrious” (Cursio 27).

<sup>12</sup> For more on this classification refer to Miguel Zugasti. Zugasti, Miguel. “Comedia palatina cómica y comedia palatina seria en el Siglo de Oro.” (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Especially considering the propensity to revolts in the city as an expression of urban frustration in the midst of an emergent criollismo (for example the tumults

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of 1624 and 1698). Richard Boyer notes that “Mexico City was a barometer of the changes, but it also organized and controlled the transition in its longstanding role of metropolis of the colony. What is important about that role in the seventeenth century is not that it existed... Rather, it is the fact that the exercise of dominance became more independent of Spain, that Mexico City more than Seville directed the colony” (457).

<sup>14</sup> Linda Cursio also notes that in the XVII century, “the local authorities ...were primarily wealthy creoles, Spaniards born in the colony...[who] constituted the notables of the city and considered their participation in city government not only a privilege but a right... Their business was the business of local politics, local concerns, and they developed a lively sense of patriotism for the capital city that, in a sense belonged to them. (10).

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Zugasti describes the style of the times as one where “domina el tono y la imaginería Petrarquista de elevados conceptos”. He states that this causes a “distanciamiento entre emisor y receptor [que] no obedece a ningún servilismo especial, sino que responde plenamente a la línea petrarquista entonces dominante” (474).

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