

Lyric intelligibility in Sor Juana's Nahuatl *tocotines*

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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Inundación castálida* (1689) contains two short pieces that incorporate the Nahuatl language. These *tocotines*, as they are designated, appear in sets of villancicos composed to celebrate the feast of the Assumption in 1676 and the feast of San Pedro Nolasco in 1677. The fact that Sor Juana wrote these two brief texts employing the indigenous Mexican tongue has generated great interest and a range of scholarly opinions about her abilities in the language and her views on the racially and linguistically diverse society of New Spain in the seventeenth century. However, one question that has received relatively little attention in this animated discussion is the extent to which these *tocotines* engage critically with earlier Spanish attempts to compose verse in Nahuatl. This line of inquiry proves particularly relevant given that the *tocotines* penned by Sor Juana share an important feature with the works of sixteenth-century friars who appropriated local musical traditions for their missionary activities: both revolve around the possibility of mutual intelligibility in a colonial context. Nevertheless, as this essay will propose, there is a crucial difference in their approaches: while early friars sought to create mutual understanding through song, the Nahuatl *tocotines* composed by Sor Juana in the late seventeenth century appear to subtly reflect and ironize the limits of such lyric intelligibility.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Describing both Nahuatl song and the villancicos by Sor Juana in terms of “lyric” raises important terminological questions. On the one hand, scholars like Gary Tomlinson have questioned the applicability of the term “poetry” (let alone “lyric”) to the kind of Nahuatl compositions evoked here (20–23). On the other, Darío Puccini has summed up the difficulty of parsing the dramatic and lyric elements of the villancicos (226–30)—and certainly, Alfonso Méndez Plancarte separates “lirica personal” from “villancicos y letras sacras” in his edition of Sor Juana's complete works. Despite these reservations, it is important to note that

As said above, the *tocotines* discussed here appear in compositions known as villancicos, popular forms that originated in the Iberian Peninsula, and whose appearance in Mexico coincided with the imposition of Christianity, the Spanish language, and European musical forms (Estrada Jasso 1: 89). While villancicos could reflect secular or sacred themes, Estrada Jasso notes the predominance of the sacred in New Spain, and speculates that this tendency reflects the Spanish desire to convert native populations (1: 60). An oft-cited example of the conjunction between the villancico form and indigenous Christianity is the record made by Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) of a 1538 Tlaxcalan performance of a mystery play on the fall of Adam and Eve, which concluded—the Franciscan reports—with a villancico that lamented the decision of Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (I.15; 240). The late seventeenth-century villancicos authored by Sor Juana are also concerned with sacred themes, prepared on request in order to commemorate particular saints and feast days in Mexican cathedrals (Tenorio 55–56). These sets of villancicos combine a variety of compositions distributed in three “nocturnes,” which corresponded to the divisions in Matins. It is in the third nocturne of the villancicos composed for the Assumption in 1676 and those composed in honor of Nolasco in 1677, where Sor Juana incorporates indigenous and mestizo voices. In the Assumption villancicos, certain “Mejicanos alegres” sing to the Virgin in

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both the Nahuatl tradition discussed here and the villancicos comprise “versos que se destinan al canto,” which, as María José Vega has noted, constituted one common characterization of lyric in Renaissance poetics (18). This broad notion, moreover, does not necessarily presuppose the distinction between music and poetry that troubles Tomlinson and others. I use the term “lyric” in this broad sense.

Nahuatl (v.74); in the Nolasco villancicos, an indigenous man speaks in a combination of Spanish and Nahuatl.<sup>2</sup>

That Sor Juana chooses to incorporate Nahuatl into two sets of villancicos is both conventional and innovative. On the one hand, it reflects the multilingual play often found in *ensaladillas*, typical components of villancicos (Estrada Jasso 2: 98). As Martha Lilia Tenorio points out in her extensive study of the villancicos by Sor Juana, the use of different racial and linguistic types—or rather, she notes, literary stereotypes—was a central feature of the *ensaladilla* in both Spain and the New World. For this reason the Nahuatl *tocotines* constitute, Tenorio concludes, “juegos lingüísticos heredados, utilizados con efectos cómicos, sonoros, de contraste, que no necesariamente reflejan una ideología o una visión social” (62). Still, there is a specificity in Sor Juana’s use of Nahuatl that cannot quite be captured in the notion of a “juego lingüístico heredado,” of traditional or inherited wordplay—and Tenorio herself remarks that “aún cuando Sor Juana es tradicional, no lo es convencionalmente” (65). If villancicos penned in the Iberian Peninsula and New Spain often incorporated languages like Latin, Portuguese and Basque, as well as the inflected Castilian of African populations, there is something contextually different about the choice to include Nahuatl in the villancicos, and this stems precisely from the fact that the indigenous language and its lyric tradition had been objects of sustained study for the purposes of appropriation and evangelization. While in generic terms the Nahuatl *tocotines* may represent variations on a particular convention of the villancicos, their contextual specificity associates them with a different tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> I cite the villancicos as they appear in the second volume of Sor Juana’s *Obras completas* edited by Méndez Plancarte. In that edition, the Assumption villancicos appear on pages 3–17, and the Nolasco villancicos, on pages 28–42.

This other tradition has its roots in New Spain in the sixteenth century, when Franciscans like Pedro de Gante and Bernardino de Sahagún observed the importance that song and dance held for indigenous communities, and sought to inscribe local lyric traditions within the project of evangelization. In a 1558 letter addressed to Felipe II, Gante describes his realization that “toda su adoración dellos á sus dioses era cantar y bailar delante dellos” (223–24). This revelation, Gante continues, led him to compose songs on doctrinal matters for indigenous singers to perform “conforme á los bailes y á los cantares que ellos cantaban” (224). The efforts of Gante and others, however, were consistently marked by ambivalence about the efficacy and even desirability of adapting the Nahuatl lyric tradition to doctrinal materials. This is particularly evident in the 1583 *Psalmodia Christiana* composed by Sahagún, a compilation of devotional songs written in the Nahuatl lyric style. Describing his reasons for creating the *Psalmodia*, Sahagún notes:

[S]e les hã dado cantares de dios, y de sus Sanctos en muchas partes, para ñ dexen los otros cantares antiguos: y han los rescebido, y han los cantado en algunas partes, y todavia los cantan: pero en otras partes, y en las mas porfian de boluer à cantar sus cantares antiguos en sus casas ò en sus tepas: (lo qual pone harta sospecha en la sinceridad de su Fee Christiana,) porñ en los cãtares antiguos, por la mayor parte se cantan cosas idolatricas en vn estilo tan obscuro, que no ay quien los pueda entēder, sino ellos solos: (6)

Taken together, the remarks of Gante and Sahagún demonstrate the tremendous preoccupation with intelligibility that guided early efforts to convert through song and dance. Gante composed meters to be performed according to the style of local traditions, hoping that formal commensurability would ease the understanding and acceptance of new ideas. Sahagún undertook a similar project in the *Psalmodia*. Both missionaries strove to devise lyrics that could communicate articles of faith and devotional practices unambiguously. On

the last point, the examiner of the *Psalmodia*, Doctor Ortiz de Hinojosa, noted approvingly that “van explicados los conceptos con estilo tã proprio y claro, que por incapazes que sean, los entenderã” (6). And just as newly devised lyrics needed to be intelligible to indigenous populations, they would also need to remain comprehensible for a clerical audience responsible for monitoring conversion; otherwise, they might reproduce or conceal the obscurity of the “cãtares antiguos” and permit the continuation of idolatrous practices.

Reexamining Sor Juana’s *tocotines* with this earlier tradition in mind permits a different approximation to the question of what these Nahuatl verses say about the nun’s perspective on the colonial world. A number of scholars have ascribed the racial and linguistic diversity of her works to an ideological or political stance about Christianity and colonial society in New Spain. This vein of criticism looks not only at the Nahuatl-language *tocotines*, but also certain *loas* (short theatrical pieces) that precede her mystery plays and include indigenous protagonists, though not the Nahuatl language. On one end of the critical spectrum, scholars like Luis Leal and Georgina Sabat de Rivers argue that these pieces reflect a deep sympathy held by Sor Juana for marginalized Mexican populations.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, scholars like Serge Gruzinski and Carlos Jáuregui argue that the poetic orchestration of those populations exemplifies the way Creole writers assumed a powerful mediating position between the New and Old Worlds and facilitated the incorporation of difference into a

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<sup>3</sup> Leal asserts that in these works Sor Juana “logra dar voz a las clases marginadas” of New Spain (199–200). In a similar vein, Sabat de Rivers identifies in the villancicos the capacity of certain African, Amerindian and mestizo figures to “hablar de modo perfecto la lengua de sus conquistadores y dueños,” and posits that these works denounce the hypocritical racism of a Christian society (254).

transatlantic poetics or a universalizing Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> Despite the divergent conclusions of these studies, they coincide in attributing a significant degree of intelligibility to the Amerindian and mestizo voices in the villancicos of Sor Juana—for some, this intelligibility is revolutionary, while for others, it is ideologically conservative. But it is also possible to read the *tocotines* as playful exercises that do not presuppose intelligibility, but rather, foreground and ironize its limits. This ironic form of inquiry, furthermore, subtly draws on the desires and fears that drove sixteenth-century Franciscan missionaries in their approach to indigenous song.

### **The Assumption, 1676**

The songs composed to celebrate the Assumption in 1676 include a *tocotín* written entirely in Nahuatl. As Gruzinski points out, the word *tocotín* had been used by the seventeenth century in order to describe a theatrical song and dance considered typical of indigenous populations. Following an *estribillo* in which two black speakers, Pilico (Perico) and Flacico (Francisco) lament the departure of the Virgin, the indigenous singers are then introduced in Spanish:

Los Mejicanos alegres  
también a su usanza salen,  
que en quien campa la lealtad,  
bien es que el aplauso campe;

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<sup>4</sup> Gruzinski has described the use of diverse voices in the villancicos as a form of “exotismo para la exportación” (para.34). Similarly, Jáuregui argues that the multiplicity of voices in the villancicos constitute “a sort of poetic procession of integration” in which “the lettered criollo...apprehends and then unites the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic hubbub of New Spain and renders the heterogeneous intelligible” (84).

y con las cláusulas tiernas  
 del Mejicano lenguaje,  
 en un Tocotín sonoro,  
 dicen con voces süaves: (vv.74–81)

These lines present indigenous voices that are accustomed to song (“a su usanza”), and adept at producing pleasing melodies (“sonoro,” “süaves”). Indeed, the dieresis employed in the word “süaves,” in addition to fulfilling the metrical requirements of the line, also emphasizes the euphonic nature of Mexica song by elongating the diphthong. These lines convey a sense of affectionate familiarity: the lyric voice knows well the style and tone of Nahuatl song, and the Nahua singers are offering a customary kind of praise.

The “Mejicanos alegres” begin their *tocotín* by addressing the Virgin:

—Tla ya timohuica,  
 totlazo Zuapilli  
 maca ammo Tonantzin,  
 titechmoilcahuíliz.  
 Ma nel in Ilhuícac  
 huel timomaquíitiz,  
 ¿amo nozo quenman  
 timotlalnamíctiz (vv.82–89)

If you leave  
 our precious lady,  
 our mother, let it not be  
 that you forget us.  
 Although in Heaven  
 you will rejoice

will you not perhaps  
remember us? (trans. Townsend 8)

In regular hexasyllables, they ask the departing Virgin to remember them and to intercede with her “precious son” (“motlazo Piltzintli”) on their behalf (v.95; trans. Townsend 8). The piece ends on a joyful note, as the singers look forward to joining the Virgin for eternity in heaven.

Critical views of Sor Juana’s aptitude in Nahuatl have varied: while scholars including Ángel María Garibay (*OC* 2: 365) and Georges Baudot (1853) considered her an elegant poet in the language, more recent studies have called into question her proficiency. Frances Karttunen points out that this composition in particular “contains a number of infelicities of the sort that reflect Spanish interference” (Karttunen). Camilla Townsend has detailed some of these infelicities, proposing that Sor Juana had some knowledge of Nahuatl, but that it was limited to a general grammatical understanding and familiarity with important words and expressions that would have been used in everyday life, as well as those pertinent to religious settings (5–6).

Sor Juana is not unique in composing Nahuatl hymns to Mary. Sahagún, for instance, included a celebration of the Assumption in his *Psalmody*, and Hernando Franco is known to have composed two extant “apostrophes to the Virgin” (Stevenson, *Music in Aztec & Inca Territory* 206). In these pieces, the singers also ask Mary to intercede with God on their behalf. For example:

Dios itlaçonantzine cemicac ichpochtle cenca timitztotlatlauhtiliya ma topan  
ximotlatolti yn ilhuicac ixpantzinco in motlaçoconetzin Jesu Cristo.

Oh precious Mother of God, oh eternal Virgin, we earnestly implore of thee:  
intercede for us. In heaven thou art in the presence of thy dearest Son, Jesus  
Christ. (Stevenson, *Music in Aztec & Inca Territory* 206)



In this composition, Mary is addressed as “Dios itlaçonantzine,” a title that designates her the mother of God, whereas Sor Juana’s *tocotín* employs the more familiar “Tonantzin,” “our mother.” This divergence reflects a somewhat controversial point, as early friars like Sahagún worried that the appellation “Tonantzin” hearkened back to a pre-Hispanic deity rather than the Christian figure.<sup>5</sup>

The level of familiarity conveyed by the use of “Tonantzin” in the *tocotín* also reflects its corporeal references to the motherhood of Mary—the fact that she has given Christ her flesh and nursed him at her breast—a point Townsend has noted would have resonated with the portrayal of Mary that was particularly popular among indigenous Christians (6). The potentially heterodox nature of this familiar, corporeal Mary is echoed in the final lines of the *tocotín*, where the indigenous singers conclude:

in campa cemicac  
 timonemitiliz  
 cemicac mochihuaz  
 in monahuatiltzin. (vv.114–117)  
 Everywhere and forever  
 will you live,  
 forever will be done  
 your will. (trans. Townsend 9)

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<sup>5</sup> Stafford Poole provides an overview of the views of Sahagún on this point, noting that “[w]hile the term was appropriate in a literal sense, Sahagún objected to it on the grounds that it was the proper name of a pagan deity and was so understood by the Indians. Hence to use it was to encourage confusion between the Virgin Mary and the mother goddess of the Aztecs, something that in Sahagún’s mind laid the way open for a revival of idolatry” (85).

There is something not quite conventional about this final exaltation of the will of Mary, who is rather meant to be an exemplar of perfect submission to the will of God. The deviation reflects another point that worried sixteenth-century missionaries, namely, confusion over the relationship between God and Mary. As Motolinía remarks in his *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, “fué menester darles también a entender quien era Santa María, porque hasta entonces solamente nombraban María, o Santa María, y diciendo este nombre pensaban que nombraban a Dios” (I.4; 211). The particular features of Mary in this *tocotín* add subtle gestures toward the limits of intelligibility in a colonial context: that Mary might be confused with God, or that indigenous converts would take Marian devotion as an opportunity to worship earlier deities were real preoccupations for clerics like Sahagún and Motolinía in the sixteenth century.

Ultimately, the nature of intelligibility in the Assumption *tocotín* is highly paradoxical: it draws on a pastoral tradition that sought to instill the comprehension of doctrine and devotional practices in the Nahuatl-speaking population through lyrics composed in their language, but does so in a way that might not have met with clerical approval and may not be entirely idiomatic. The use of Nahuatl in this *tocotín* performs, in this way, a gesture that simultaneously includes a marginalized linguistic community and maintains its alterity. It might remind a Spanish-speaking audience of the sonorous presence of the Nahuas and their lyric tradition, but at the same time, it reinforces their linguistic inscrutability. It is not a minor irony that the euphonic qualities of the *tocotín* described in its introduction appear to create a counterpoint to its linguistic ambiguity: a *tocotín* both beautiful and potentially heterodox is, precisely, the very thing that sixteenth-century clerics like Sahagún had feared.

**San Pedro Nolasco, 1677**

The paradoxical intelligibility described in the Assumption *tocotín* becomes even more apparent in comparison to the *tocotín* included in the set of villancicos dedicated to Pedro Nolasco in 1677. The first nocturne in this collection emphasizes significant parallels between Nolasco and Christ; namely, that both are children of Mary, and that both take on the role of redeemers. The importance of the Virgin Mary in the life of Nolasco had been recorded in his early modern biographies: while gravely ill, Nolasco had received a vision of the Virgin, who commanded him to dedicate himself to the faith by serving prisoners and captives. He carried out her command by ransoming captives in the Muslim-dominated Iberian Peninsula. Nolasco's work rescuing captives gives rise to the second parallel between the saint and Christ:

Casi con igual estima  
a los dos Hijos mandó:  
si Uno las almas sanó,  
otro los cuerpos redima,  
porque al cristiano no oprima  
del moro la tiranía,  
*por ser hijo de María.* (vv.28–34)

Christ and Nolasco are both redeemers: the former saves souls, while the latter ransoms bodies. It is this characterization, of Nolasco as “redeemer,” that will be the subject of doubt and debate as the third and final nocturne concludes in an *ensaladilla*.

In the villancico form, the *ensalada* or *ensaladilla* is typically characterized by a heterogeneity of meter and voice, the incorporation of popular verses and sayings, a frequently ludic tone, a heightened emphasis on performance, and the incorporation of a variety of languages and dialects (Tenorio 43, 149). In the *ensaladilla* portion of the third nocturne of the villancicos composed for Nolasco in 1677, Sor Juana integrates a range of

voices: the accented Castilian of a black speaker gives way to an amusing dialogue between a pompous Latin student and an uncomprehending interlocutor, and finally, a combative “Indio” closes the cycle with a “Tocotín mestizo / de Español y Mejicano” (vv.71–72).

The black speaker initially criticizes the notion of celebrating Nolasco as a redeemer: “Eya dici que redimi / cosa palece encantala, / por que yo la Oblaje vivo, / y las Parre no mi saca” (vv.17–20). He accuses the Mercedarians of hypocrisy for celebrating a redemptive saint while he toils without any relief.<sup>6</sup> The *ensaladilla* continues with the introduction of “un estudiantón, / de Bachiller afectado, / que escogiera antes ser mudo / que hablar en Castellano” (vv.37–40). The linguistic inflexibility of the student quickly becomes comical, as he begins to “spout Latinisms” at a bemused interlocutor. The two speakers are incompatible: the student refuses to engage in Spanish, and the “barbado” does not understand Latin:

*Hodie Nolascus divinus*

*in Caelis est collocatus.*

—Yo no tengo asco del vino,  
que antes muero por tragarlo.

—*Uno mortuo Redemptore,*  
*alter est redemptor natus.*

Yo natas buenas bien como  
que no he visto buenos natos. (vv.45–52)

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<sup>6</sup> The critical attitude in these lines, however, is quickly repudiated by the speaker himself, who asks that “El Santo me lo perrone” (v.33). Geoffrey Baker has argued that this is typical of what he terms the ‘ethnic villancicos’ of Sor Juana, which may draw attention to injustice, but then subvert that attention to conservative ideological obedience (405).

In this case, the lofty comparison between the redemptive death of Christ and the redemptive birth of Nolasco is completely lost on the layman, who comically misunderstands the Latin *divinus* (divine) and *natus* (born) for the Spanish *vino* (wine) and *nata* (cream). Once this amusing bilingual dialogue is over, the indigenous speaker enters the scene to again censure the celebration of Nolasco as a redeemer:

Los Padres bendito  
 tiene on Redentor,  
*amo nic neltoea*  
*quimati no Dios.*

Sólo Dios *Piltzintli*  
 del Cielo bajó,  
 y nuestro *tlatlácol*  
 nos lo perdonó. (vv.73–80)

The blessed Fathers  
 have uh Redeemer  
*I don't believe it,*  
*my God knows better.*

Our God's son *Piltzintli*  
 came down from heaven:  
 for our sins or *tlatlácol*  
 he pardoned us all. (trans. Gómez "From the *Villancicos* for Saint Peter  
 Nolasco" 134)

By aggressively asserting that only God, in the person of Christ, should be described as a redeemer, the indigenous man believes he has caught the "Padres" in an error, but in fact, he has misunderstood the comparison drawn between Christ and the saint. His objection joins

the other passages in the *ensaladilla* to interrogate the celebration of Nolasco as a redeemer. Still, the piece incorporating Nahuatl seems to exacerbate the issues raised in the other two: while the black speaker criticizes the celebration of redemption as hypocritical, the indigenous man misunderstands it; misunderstanding is a feature of the Latin-Spanish dialogue, but in the *tocotín*, one voice alone generates all the confusion. In short, the *tocotín* brings the *ensaladilla* to a climax of unintelligibility.

The confusion apparent in the words of the indigenous speaker is reflected more broadly in the dramatic, musical, and linguistic features of the *tocotín*. When the Latin-Spanish dialogue ends at an impasse, the *ensaladilla* introduces the indigenous speaker with the hint that he will somehow alleviate the tension created by the misunderstanding between the student and the layman:

Púsolos en paz un Indio,  
que, cayendo y levantando,  
tomaba con la cabeza  
la medida de los pasos;<sup>7</sup>  
el cual en una guitarra  
con ecos desentonados,  
cantó un Tocotín mestizo  
de Español y Mejicano. (vv.65–72)

The peace promised in line 65 contrasts ironically with the confrontational attitude of the Indian: he goes on to brag that he would have killed many Moors if he had been alive in the

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<sup>7</sup> The very entrance of the *indio* has provoked rather disparate critical readings. Puccini reads these lines as a celebration of autochthonous dance in which the steps “involucran todo el cuerpo y hasta la cabeza” (228). In contrast, Tenorio sees the line “que cayendo y levantando” as indicative of drunken stumbling (159).

time of Nolasco: “*cen sontle* [four hundred] *matara* / *con un mojiçón*” (vv.95–96). And as proof of his skill, he boasts that he once attacked (and perhaps killed) an official who was pursuing him for taxes: “*Mas yo con un cuáhuatl* [wooden implement] / *un palo lo dió, / ipam i sonteco* [on his head] / *no se si morió* (vv.113–116).

The musical features of the *tocotín* add to its overall dissonance. The term *tocotín* derives from syllabic notations for different rhythms that would have been played on the *teponaztli* and *huehuetl*, percussion instruments used to accompany traditional Nahuatl songs like those transcribed and compiled in the late sixteenth century in the *Cantares Mexicanos* manuscript (Stevenson, *Music in Mexico* 10; Tomlinson 43n21). The *Cantares*, or at least the kinds of songs collected in that manuscript, represent the native lyric tradition that Sahagún and others drew on when attempting to create orthodox and intelligible Nahuatl songs in the sixteenth century. And while the term “*tocotín*” reaches back to these same alphabetic notations for percussion cadences, here the accompaniment is a guitar, a device introduced by the Spanish in Mexico, where stringed instruments had not been in use before the Conquest (Stevenson, *Music in Mexico* 9). It is perhaps the amalgamation of Amerindian and Iberian elements in this song that creates its “*ecos desentonados*,” its overall sense of dissonance.

Unlike the entirely Nahuatl *tocotín* that accompanies the earlier villancicos for the Assumption, the language of the Nolasco *tocotín* is a hybrid of Spanish and Nahuatl. Still, as in the Assumption *tocotín*, the Nahuatl employed in this one is not always grammatically precise (Townsend 4). But even in this common feature, there is an important difference: in the Nolasco *tocotín*, the imprecisions of the Nahuatl correspond to those incurred in the Spanish segments. For example, the phrase that should be “*un Redentor*” is rendered “*on Redentor*,” and the indigenous man speaks threateningly of “*los perro Moro*,” evincing unfamiliarity with nominal number agreement (vv.74; 91). We again find, in this sense, a kind of paradoxical intelligibility in the Nolasco *tocotín*: in substance and presentation, the

words of the Indian, like the other pieces in the *ensaladilla*, dramatize a lack of intelligibility and even a linguistic and musical dissonance. But at the same time, the similarly unidiomatic features of Spanish and Nahuatl here create a rather more harmonious and sensible whole than the pure Nahuatl of the Assumption *tocotín*.

Even though the concrete identification of resonances between Sor Juana's use of Nahuatl and her sixteenth-century antecedents would demand a more systematic examination, the analysis presented above suggests the critical appeal of reading her Nahuatl *tocotines* in relation to the clerical preoccupations that guided prior lyric production in that language in New Spain. This is not to say, of course, that Sor Juana was perforce influenced by or had read those specific texts. And yet, the consideration of those antecedents evinces that she is drawing on and reimagining the broad questions bound up with composing religious verse in an indigenous language, and the specific form that those issues took in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century New Spain. In this sense, perhaps, rather than ultimately revolutionary or conservative, Sor Juana is playing with the old missionary anxiety regarding cultural and religious intelligibility in lyric form, probing its limits in the colonial Mexican context.



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