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An article appearing in

Emblematica
An Interdisciplinary Journal for Emblem Studies

Volume 16 (2008)

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New York
Emblematic Resources and Parallels in a Colonial Mexican Poet: Luis de Sandoval Zapata

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Luis de Sandoval Zapata lived in the realm of New Spain between 1618 and 1671, although the exact date of his birth is unknown. Some documents indicate that he may have been born in Guadalajara and later taken by his mother, already then a widow, to the capital of New Spain. Born into a family of politicians and churchmen, with his own father a doctor, Luis de Sandoval Zapata was inclined from a young age to literature and philosophy, authoring a number of books about various subjects, including Christian stoic philosophy, characteristic of the Counter-Reformation, magic, and heretical and pagan doctrines, as well as many poems. Almost all of his works are unfortunately now lost; one of the few exceptions is the collection of sonnets preserved by the Jesuit order, which seems to have inherited some of his writings. Sandoval himself studied in the College of San Ildefonso before he devoted himself to the administration of a sugar mill in Cuernavaca, a business he could not make profitable and which led him and his family to a slow, but progressive, economic decline.

1. In the foreword to his Panegírico a la paciencia he mentions the following works by his pen: Tyberio Cesar Polytico, Apología por la novedad, Información panegírica por Orígenes, Epicteto cristiano, De magia, Examen sanitatis, Doctrinae gentium et haereticorum, and Questiones selectae (Sandoval Zapata, 122).
Sandoval Zapata lived at a time when knowledge about nature was penetrated by symbolism, as were alchemy and physics. In art, the power of symbols enhanced the autonomy of artistic mimesis. The accumulation of inanimate objects in Mannerist representations already exploited a deliberate semantization of the most trivial elements of everyday life, which became an encoded message within the artistic work, proving that what was seemingly ornamental could have an independent meaning. In the context of the Baroque Age, Alain Tapié mentions the work of a Flemish Jesuit, Leroy d’Alard, about “the sanctity of life derived from the consideration of flowers” (D’Alard; Tapié, 29 and note 51). The Jesuit order adopted this kind of philosophy from Leroy d’Alard, which itself was inspired by Suger (Goody, 175), as well as by the Beguine nuns and the German mystics of the fourteenth century. From Italy, Pierio Valeriano’s and Cesare Ripa’s floral emblematics permeated the works of Spanish emblematic authors, who linked it with the ascetic Counter-Reformation program. From the Spanish emblem tradition Sebastián de Covarrubias stands out with his Emblemas morales. Covarrubias includes in his emblem collection three flowers (Century I, emblem 5; Century II, emblems 104 and 112), which also appear in Luis de Sandoval Zapata’s sonnets: the rose, the white lily, and the sunflower. The carnation is missing, although it is in the great emblematic flower repertory by Rafael García Mahiques, Flora emblemática, aproximación descriptiva del código icónico (841), discussed below. The carnation is also mentioned by Julián Gállego as an emblem of Human Love,² of alliances and matrimony, while for Christianity it represents Divine Love, embodied by the Virgin Mary (Gállego, 192-93).

Besides the influence of his contemporaries, the Andalusian poets Ríoja, Góngora, Jacinto Polo, and Pedro de Soto y Rojas, who shared the topic of flowers in their poetry, the emblems of Sebastián de Covarrubias were an important starting point for Luis de Sandoval Zapata, as were Hernando de Soto’s Emblemas moralizados (Madrid, 1599), Juan de Borja’s Empresas morales (Prague, 1581; Brussels, 1680), and even foreign emblematists such as the translation of Otto Vaeinius’s Teatro moral de la vida humana, en cien

². In the introduction by Bernard Mercier to Fleurs et Jardins dans l’Art Flamand, cited in Gállego, 192, n. 38.
emblematic, con el Enchiridion de Epicteto, y la Tabla de Cebes (Brussels, 1672), Sambucus’ Emblemata (Antwerp, 1564), Scipione Bargagli’s Dell'impresse (Venice, 1594), Giovio’s Diálogo de las empresas militares y amorosas (Lyon, 1561), and Simeoni’s Dialogo dell’imprese militari et amorose . . . (Lyon, 1574), which he might have known either directly or indirectly, as well as the Christian emblems disseminated by the Jesuit order.³

Of the thirty surviving sonnets, twelve, that is, nearly half of them, are devoted to flowers. Sandoval Zapata takes two rhetorical tracks; the first is to mention clearly the flower about which each sonnet is composed; this happens in five of them, one each about the rose, the carnation, the sunflower, and two about the white lily. The second choice consists in hiding the name of the flower, as happens in the other seven sonnets. In three of them, Sandoval adopts a mechanism similar to that of the riddles spread by poetic collections or cancioneros,⁴ which offer readers a poetic interpretation of a motif to decipher according to either the metaphors or the image described at the beginning in an epigraph. The pleasure consists then in guessing the hidden title, which plainly names the object. The relationship to emblems is quite evident, for taking the place of the res picta is the epigraph describing the figure; that of the commentary is the poetical text with all its allusive metaphors; and that of the motto is the title or answer to the riddle. In this way, Sandoval Zapata omits the picture or its straightforward description and suppresses the titles, either to refer to a mere abstraction or to make the reader guess which flower has inspired the poem. This last choice takes place in sonnets 20, 23, and 26, leaving only four sonnets about the abstraction “flower,” expressing the brevity of life. As for those three that have an emblematic as well as enigmatic quality, only the first will be analyzed here in depth. The other two hide the names of the pomegranate flower and the white lily, respectively. In sonnet 20, “Flor a quien el Favonio blando bate,” various characteristics that relate it to the narcissus can be observed:

³. For a wide account of emblematic authors known in Colonial Mexico, see Osorio, 173-88.

⁴. One of the cancioneros is the Segunda parte del romancero general y flor de diversa poesía, collected by Miguel de Madrigal.
Flor a quien el Favonio blando bate
con tantas lenguas cuantas plumas bellas,
madruga y a hablar con las estrellas,
av de luz con pico de granate.

Peligros son cuantas centellas cate,
volcán que sobre el céfiro descueillas;
la misma vanidad de tus centellas
es munición que a tu beldad combate.

No ansiosa rompas el umbral del nido,
mira que para estar anochecida
basta el exordio de querer lucirse.

No te escribas período tan florido,
porque en estos papeles de la vida
más fácil es borrarse que escribirse.5

In addition to the typical narcissistic connotation of vanity, this flower is made of light, with a suitable yellow or white color; it is shaped like a star—the reason why it comes out to chat with the stars—and has a reddish beak, or central stigma, shaped like a bell. The narcissus is vain on account of its brightness, but, above all, it writes itself in a “flowery period” of its own life, when, according

5. Sandoval Zapata, 99. My literal translations of the poems are intended to avoid misinterpretations. The author and the editors would like to thank Professor Dwight E. Raak TenHuisen, Calvin College, and Arlys Gingold for their help.

Flower whom gentle Favonius strikes
With as many tongues as pretty feathers,
You got up early to chat(ter) with the stars,
Bird of light with a garnet beak.

The dangers are as many as the sparks I might observe,
You, volcano, who stands out against the Zephyrus;
The very vanity of your sparks
is ammunition which assails your beauty.

Do not eagerly break the threshold of your nest
Consider that in order to be darkened
The exordium to want to shine is enough.

Do not write yourself such a flowery period
Because in these papers of life
It is easier to be erased than to be written.
to the poet, it is easier "to be erased than written." García Mahiques, in his dissertation about floral emblems, states that one of the scientific names of the narcissus is *Narcissus poeticus*, according to Theophrast's nomenclature (533). Thus, on the one hand, it is very possible that in this sonnet Sandoval is referring to himself as a poet. On the other hand, the funerary meaning of the narcissus is derived from its identification with narcotics, which take their generic name from the flower. Its juice causes a sleep similar to death, which was the reason why the dead were usually crowned by narcissus (535). García Mahiques illustrates the meaning of *philautia* [self-love] with an emblem by Alciato (fig. 1), referring to the narcissus, that is, the love for one's own opinion and looking down on the wisdom of the elders. Sandoval's criticism of this flower in sonnet 20 is based on its audacity of blooming or writing itself without listening to wise advice about its brief life. Deep down, he criticizes himself as a "philautic" poet who stubbornly renders a poem in spite of its—and his—unavoidable demise.

6. About meanings related to Greek mythology, García Mahiques refers to Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I, 2.

Here we witness a very particular twilight. In the first stanza, we have the characteristic grammatical ambiguity in Sandoval: “quien para oriente de beldad nada,” that is, the woman who “is born for the east” and thus is placed towards the setting sun. In the next two verses of this first quatrain, it is practically impossible to determine if the hyperbaton expresses that the sun seeks the sphere of the moon, while setting, to reflect himself in her and not die completely, or if the moon, from her sphere, seeks the sun to drink its last reflections (“para detener lo que a expirar corrió”). The reciprocity is evidently intentional and also one of the conceptual traits of the sonnet. The poet appears in the second quatrain, seeking light in that very space of occidental intercourse. In such action he is dying in the fire of love, a fire that equates him to the expiring rays of the setting sun, poignant and paroxysmal. In the last two verses emerges the unsuspected element that Sandoval proposes: during the last hours (“último período”) in that precise evening when she looks from a balcony, there will be a night, or moon, that will “get the better of” his life (“luna era que mi vida madrugaba”). The third stanza shows her absorbing the sun’s vigor, while it fades away. The continuing self-confidence of her feminine vitality is opposed to the sun’s hasty exit and disappearance. At the same time, her vitality is capable of hurting the poet’s sight because of its intensity, just as if she were the day’s sunlight. The sonnet finishes with a contrast between the dim light of the sunset, like that of a fireplace or funeral pyre, and the splendidly shining woman, “sol más vivo,” who takes over the whole world, and the poet, whom she seduces into life itself (“estás enamorado para vidas”), illuminating, nurturing, and revitalizing him.

The difference to his predecessors in New Spain is that Sandoval transcends the simple topic of Endymion and the moon by putting the three parties—sun, moon, and poet—in a quite different, and more complex, interaction. In the first place, it is striking that the woman is definitely replacing the dying sun and absorbing its light and strength. Second, the poet surrenders to this new feminine

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You, immobile, give wounds of health.
Easterlies for pyres he is giving,
And you from the sunset, sun most alive,
Are wooing to give life.
sun, not by suffering and agonizing, as he was in the second stanza, but, in contrast, by regaining life and viability through her. It is only the setting sun that “dies” as a result of this alchemy. The atmosphere is oniric, but at the end the poet does not wake up to a crude and lonely reality, as is usual in the Petrarchan tradition. Instead, his dream becomes joyfully real.

There are several emblematic sources for this poem. The first example from the Spanish emblematic tradition is “Cuanto más contraria, más reluce” from Juan de Borja’s Empresas morales (fig. 2), only that Sandoval seems to subscribe to the meaning that Sebastián de Covarrubias gives to the same image in “Clario absens” (Century II, emblem 41), emphasizing the triumph of the moon over the sun. This meaning is clearly related to the version by Scipione Bargagli, about love rather than moral persistence (fig. 3). This emblem depicts a man and a woman witnessing a conjunction of the sun and the moon. The man holds


10. “Acceptam fero lucem,” or the French motto, “Le reçoì de m’amie vigueur et vie,” from Pieter Hooft, Emblemata amatoria, which, in turn, parallels Otto Vaenius’s Amorum emblemata, Antwerp, 1608, a polyglot edition containing Spanish text. This emblem is inspired by Bargagli’s Dell’imprese, 394.
a mirror that reflects the woman, and the motto expresses that he is endowed with life and vigor by his lady. In Sandoval’s sonnet, the woman is inseminated by the sun at twilight, just as Saint Augustine and Ficino describe the *logos spermatus*, the name that the stoics gave to the Spirit: that is, the Grace that impregnates matter. In this way, the woman is moon, sun, and earth or primal matter, that which *will be or becomes* by a foreign agent that will transform her. At the same time, the sun’s extinction eliminates it as a third party, but only after it engraves its luminous seal on the object of desire, leaving the poet and the beloved woman alone.

The very contiguous depiction of her and the sun together in the first stanza is comparable to an alchemical *coniunctio*, a union of opposite principles, which in turn leads to *nigredo*, or death, and then to resurrection. From another point of view, the poet’s moon-spell seems to be the effect of a solar eclipse, the usual symbol of the *coniunctio*. The melancholic image of the Black Sun, so meaningful among Renaissance symbols in mysticism (Bartra, 107-28) as well as in alchemical treatises, like the sixteenth century’s *Splendor solis* (fig. 4), is precisely what seems to be at the bottom of the allegory in Sandoval’s sonnet (Roob, 227-51, 463, and 517; Trismosin, 58-59). Sandoval was well acquainted with stoic philosophy and alchemical symbolism, as can be seen in his prose work *Panegyrico a la paciencia* (Sandoval, 121-42). The range of his poem is archetypical, the union of opposites or hierogamy, very much as Sambucus represents it in his emblem “In sponsalia Ioanni Ambii Angli et Albae Rolleae D. Arnoldi medici Gandavensis filiae”

Fig. 3. “Acceptam fero lucem,” in Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, Amsterdam, 1611, Parallel of “Receptum exhibit,” in Scipione Bargali, *Dell’improse*, Venetia, 1594. (Courtesy of Els Stronks, Emblem Project Utrecht.)

12. *Théologie platonicienne*, vol. I, book III, chapter 1, 128, 136. At the end of this chapter, Ficino exemplifies divine illumination of the soul with the sun enlightening the moon.
about the matrimony of a politically important couple of his age. Its final result calls to mind another emblem, well-known to readers of alchemical books: the woman's magnificent figure at the end of the poem resembles the hermetic mermaid (fig. 5), who comprises in herself both opposite principles, and from whose breasts spring either milk and blood, or silver and gold. This emblematic idea has been part of Christian art since the Middle Ages; in the church of San Zeno, in Verona, the sculpture of a woman nurses two fishes, one with each breast. In sixteenth-century colonial Mexico, the friars directed the Indian painters, or tlacuilo, to depict a mermaid nursing two fishes on a wall of the Augustinian temple of Ixmiquilpan. Critics have mistakenly thought it the figure of Mayahuel, the goddess of the maguey plant (Guerrero Guerrero, xxxi), said to have four hundred breasts that distill pulque. The real origin of this image in Ixmiquilpan is, however, European, and most probably a syncretic representation. An alchemical emblem of the *Aurora consurgens* from the sixteenth century represents Sophia, nurturing with both breasts

Fig. 4. “Nigredo,” in Salomon Trismosin, *Splendor Solis*, Hamburg, 1708, 19. (Courtesy of Adam McLean, The Alchemy Web Site.)

Fig. 5. Daniel Stolcius, *Hortulus hermeticus*, Frankfurt, 1627, 140. (Courtesy of Adam McLean, The Alchemy Web Site.)

two wise men, or alchemists. The title of this book was inspired by the Song of Solomon, 6.9: “Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut acies ordinata” [Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?].

But even without acknowledging these antecedents, Sandoval’s fondness for alchemy alone explains the coincidence with the above-mentioned emblem of the coniunctio, for in alchemy the sun itself must undergo a process of transmutation. In his sonnet, as at the winter solstice, the decline and death of the father becomes the birth and well-being of the son. A theological decoding is also possible, since the poet is redeemed by the feminine principle: an inhabited black sun, filled with germinal power.

The rather complex net of emblematic repercussions in sonnet 13 is counterbalanced by other sonnets that can be more directly related to a certain emblem within the Petrarchan tradition as transmitted to Spanish baroque poetry. Sandoval Zapata’s sonnets 7, 10, 11, and 16 clearly allude to three such emblems. Of his thirty sonnets, twelve are dedicated to flowers, as mentioned above, another two—sonnets 10 and 11—deal with the emblem of the bird of paradise, or Manucodiata, either directly or as substituted by another bird, the heron. In these cases the heron of the poem shares the characteristics of the mythical bird of paradise; that is, to fly always towards the sky and never alight on earth.

A una garza remontada

Tú que rompiste esa ciudad del viento
trepa al sol, alcázares de nieve;
que por enamorada, si por breve,
ya fuiste girasol, ya pensamiento.

Ya tu ambición al párpado sediento
paciendo en tanto espíritu no muere,
y cuando en golfo imperceptible bebe
le paga en parasismos el aliento.

14. Emblem from the Aurora consurgens, MS Rhenoviensis 172, Zürich Zentralbibliothek.
En dos alas espíritu embarcado,
si por ardiente de tan grande abismo
voló planeta de erizada espuma,
no descienda tu espíritu elevado,
pase a constelación tu parasismo,
quédate estrella, ya no bajes pluma.

Al mismo asunto

Ave que te llevó tu fantasía
a vagorosos piélagos del viento,
al sol, cuando calzaste el ardimiento,
las plumas del espíritu del día.  
Conceden tanto mar de argentería,
entre respiración y movimiento,
cuando encendido, inmóvil, el aliento,
fuiste centella de su abismo fría.
Te derretiste, tan de luz avara,
que cuando un Mongibelo desataste,
no volviste señal de una centella;

porque la emulación no te intentara
apagar el ardor, más afectaste
perderte polvo que bajar estrella.

16. Ms 1600 of the Biblioteca Nacional de México reads “sus plumas” (not “las plumas”), clearly a copy error. It would be a grammatical error as well as a semantic aberration, due to the possessive repetition with both instances of “del” in the same verse: “del espíritu del día.” For the same reason, a comma is needed after “ardimiento” in the preceding verse. It seems the only solution possible: a double, emphatic direct complement. The 1986 edition leaves the verse as the copyist wrote it (Sandoval Zapata, 90).

17. **To a soaring heron**

You, who split that city of wind,
climbing to the sun, fortresses of snow,
Because enamored, if just briefly,
then you were a sunflower, then a thought.
Already your lust for the thirsty eyelid
Grazing in such spirit does not die,
And when it drinks in an imperceptible gulf,
Only German medieval symbolism portrays the soaring heron as the Christian soul in spiritual ascension. Either Sandoval had some indirect knowledge of this particular meaning, or he intentionally takes the symbolism of the bird of paradise and applies it to the heron in sonnet 10. This may be because sonnet 11 is the more interesting of the two sonnets, and he therefore chose to extend this symbolic conceit. Juan de Borja’s *empresa* XLIX depicts this footless, fluffy bird (fig. 6) (García Mahiques, 110-11), while the motto “Aut volare, aut quiescere” [Either to fly or to stay] and the description allude to a stoic prudence that does not correspond to Sandoval’s sonnets. The emblematic match as a whole is to be found in Hernando de Soto’s emblem “Optima cogitatio” [The highest thoughts] (58-60), whose epigram and description are clearly the one to which Sandoval refers in both sonnets: the lofty, platonic aim of the human mind and soul.

Your breath pays it back with paroxysms.
spirit embarked on two wings
if because of burning with such a great abyss
the planet of bristly foam flew,
May your soaring soul not descend
may your paroxysm turn into a constellation,
remain a star, do not lower a feather.

On the same subject
Bird which carried your fantasy
To flimsy oceans of wind
To the sun, when you treaded the burning,
The feathers of the spirit of the day.
They grant such a sea of embellishment
Between respiration and movement,
When inflamed, motionless your breath,
You were a cold spark of their abyss.
You melted, so greedy of light
That when you unleashed a Mongibelo* 
You did not return a sign of a spark
Because emulation would not try
To quench your ardor, you feigned
To lose dust rather than to lower a star.
* [A poetic name for the Sicilian volcano Etna.]

18. See Biedermann, 207-08, who mentions the medieval bestiaries and refers to Unterkircher. I could not confirm this exact meaning in the Spanish *Fisiólogo* nor in the *Bestiary of Christ* by Charbonneau-Lasséy.
towards the divine and eternal (fig. 7).

In sonnet 16 Sandoval deals with an even more traditional emblematic image: that of the moth circling a flame. The title, “A gentleman’s great risk in a butterfly metaphor,” seems to circumscribe the meaning of the poem to human love, the gentleman is so dazzled by that for which he yearns that he dies for, and is destroyed by it.

In poco mar de luz ve oscuras ruiñas,
nave que desplegaste vivas velas;
la más fúnebre noche que recelas
se enciende entre la luz que te avecinas.

No retire tu espíritu cobarde
el vuelo de la luz donde te ardías,
abrásate en el riesgo que buscabas.

Dichosamente entre sus lumbres arde,
porque al dejar de ser lo que vivías
te empezaste a volver en lo que amabas.  

The last two stanzas in this sonnet refer to a concept of human love closely related to divine love, as can be found in a key text for Spanish Petrarchan and baroque poets, in America as well as in Spain, Judah Leon Abravanel’s *Diálogos de amor* (Third dialogue, 131-32). Here, Philo tries to explain to Sophia how love can cut the ties with the material world when it finally accomplishes what it longs for, comparing this with what the Scriptures say about Moses and Aaron, who died by God’s mouth, that is, by God’s kiss. “Death by the kiss,” it is called in cabalistic and mystical literature, which agrees with Sandoval’s interest in both subjects. The same can be said about his acknowledgment of Pico della Mirandola’s works in the foreword to his own *Panegírico a la paciencia*, namely the

21. **Big risk of a gentleman in metaphor of a butterfly**
Animate glass who in the light comes
Upon the darkness in which you freeze your life
And you long for the brief moment of death
on the circumference which you walk.
In the little sea of light behold the somber ruins
Ship with living sails which you unfolded;
The most gloomy night which you fear
Flares up among the light which you approach.
May the flight of the light where you were burning
Not take away your cowardly spirit,
May you be consumed by the risk which you were seeking.
Joyfully burn amongst the flames,
For upon ceasing to be that which you were living
You began to turn into that which you loved.

22. His Spanish name is León Hebreo.
human love. In Sandoval’s poem, the particular emphasis on spiritual completion suggests mystical connotations and their cabalistic sources, of which Maimonides (III, 51, 541-42) and Judah Leon Abravanel belong to the Spanish philosophical tradition.

Finally, sonnet 7, entitled “A lady reflected in a crystal skull,” describes how a beautiful woman sees her own reflection, not in a mirror, but in a crystal skull.

Una dama se vio en una calavera de cristal
En calavera de cristal se vía
en el espejo docto escarmentaba
la que, cuando belleza se miraba,
luz mortal de belleza se atendía.
Cuando secreto fuego introducía,
una diáfana Troya se quemaba

Heptapidus (Sandoval Zapata, 122). The allusion in the sonnet echoes not only Petrarch’s sonnet 19 in the Canzoniere, but also a number of emblematists such as Otto Vaenius (“Brevis et damnosa voluptas”) (fig. 8), Junius (“Amoris ingenui tormentum”), Simeoni (Dialogo dell’imprese, “Cosi de ben amar porto tormento”), and Juan de Borja’s “Fugienda peto” (fig. 9), concerning
y polvo cristalino sospechaba
la que luciente eternidad ardía.

¡Ah, dice, cómo en el cristal diviso
a lo que más eterno resplandece,
puede ser escarmiento de ceniza!

La muerte ha de morir, que como se hizo
de cristal, que a la vida se parece,
quebradiza. 23

The references are various.24 There are the Exercises by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who advised readers to meditate on the sight of a skull, an issue that became a universal topic in painting and literature. But there is, too, the dialogue between Menippus and Hermes in Luciano de Samosata’s Dialogues of the Dead (121-22),

23. A lady reflected in a crystal skull
In a crystal skull she was seeing herself
In the learned mirror she chastised
The woman who, when she looked at her beauty,
She was aware of the fatal glimmer of beauty.
While she was introducing a secret flame
A diaphanous Troy was burning
And she suspected crystalline dust
The woman who burned a shining eternity.
Ah she says, how in the crystal I confusedly see
That which most eternal shines,
Can be a lesson of ashes.
Death must die; since it is made
of crystal, that resembles life,
death is itself brittle.

24. Goodman-Soellner offers the example the French poet Tristan l’Hermite (1601?–1655), a contemporary of Sandoval Zapata, who wrote the following verses:

Amarillis in looking at herself
In order to be counseled of her grace,
Today puts flames into this looking-glass;
And from a common crystal makes a burning mirror.

(“Amarille en se regardant / Pour se conseiller de sa grace, / Met aujourd’hui des feux dans cette glace; / Et d’un cristal commun fait un miroir ardent.” Les amours de feu Mr. Tristan, et autres pièces très-curieuses, Paris, 1662, 81). Trans. Goodman-Soellner, 220.
very popular among seventeenth-century Spanish authors, where Hermes shows Menippus the skulls of many beautiful men and women of lore, and, glancing at the one that belonged to Helen of Troy, it reminds him of the brevity of life and beauty. The woman in Sandoval is clearly related to Helen in the second verse of the second stanza. The emblem alluded to here was also very well-known: Sebastián de Covarrubias' emblem 82 in Century II (fig. 10): “Considerauit se ipsum, et abiit” [He beheld himself, and went his way] from the epistle of James 1:24. In it, a terminus statue made of bones and a skull holds a mirror facing the reader. But there is more, for the crystal skull is really what stands out as new in this heap of classical and biblical references. In the last two stanzas, the beautiful woman seems to read the skull as if she were scrying, (to scry is to divine by looking into a glass) seeing there her own future. Actually, crystal skulls from ancient Mexico, either Aztec or Mayan, were sometimes found during the Spanish colonization period and afterwards (fig. 11).25 The mention of the crystal skull in Sandoval’s sonnet obviously reveals that he himself was acquainted with at least one of these strange sculptures. Sandoval skillfully combines this uncommon Novo Hispanic cultural trait with his classical and biblical heritage, taking Covarrubias’ emblem as the axis of his meditations.

Luis de Sandoval Zapata’s poetry is a living proof that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was not alone in a bare poetic landscape in seventeenth-century Mexico.26 Above all, his work makes evident that emblematic sources in literary works were common enough in his context to account for Sor Juana’s poem Primero sueño, composed entirely as an emblematic sequence only two decades after

25. Most are now in the British Museum or in the hands of private collectors with all of the imitations since made.

26. Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo in his commentary to “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” in Historia de la poesía hispanoamericana, 58. Following Menéndez Pelayo, numerous twentieth-century critics repeated this false notion.
Fig. 10. “Consideravit se ipse,” in Sebastián de Covarrubias, Emblemæ mo- rales, Madrid, 1610, II, 82. (Courtesy of Sagrañio López Poza, Emblemática hispánica.)
Sandoval Zapata died. His enigmatic sonnets remained unstudied by an oblivious posterity, and scholars are only now beginning to rediscover many of the symbols of the past.

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