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**HEARTS IN THE HEARTH:
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S SONNETS
OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL**

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge about the realities of women's lives in the seventeenth-century Iberian peninsula, through a socio-historical interpretation of the poetic production of five women. One is Portuguese, Violante del Cielo, and four are Spaniards: Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva, Marcia Belisarda and Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán. All are from the educated upper or noble classes and their lives span some one hundred and forty years, from 1566 to 1693. The thesis focuses particularly on their sonnets of love and friendship, both secular and religious.

The sonnet was specifically chosen as the vehicle to study the ideas and concerns of literate, seventeenth-century women. As a difficult form of poetry requiring wit, artistry and education, sonnets enable a display of intellectual capabilities and offer opportunities for veiled criticism of contemporary systems of control. These women do not overtly rail against a system that offers them much in terms of social advancement and privilege. However, they do re-write our understanding of the Baroque by presenting their interests, pleasures and discontents from a feminine viewpoint.

This detailed, contextual study of women's works, set against the philosophical, religious and moral treatises that governed their age, enables a wider interpretation of women's thought and intentions in the Iberian peninsula than may hitherto have been acknowledged, particularly in terms of relationships of affection within the family. Collectively, their individual works display a determination to demonstrate women's intelligence and moral strength. Furthermore, it becomes clear that women living within a system that utilised biological determinism as proof that they were incapable of reason, strive in their works to show that they are both capable of reason and determined to demonstrate it as undeniable fact.

In loving memory of

BEN AND IRYN

Two hearts, one soul, one hearth

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