

ring it engraved on a sapphire blue heaven:⁴⁸
a thousand times thousand points,
a thousand golden flows (lines,
I say, of brilliant light) shone
from a luminous circumference, scoring
the cerulean page of the heavens, and
forming troops they charged the erstwhile ebony
tyrant of their empire, who in disorder hastily fled
stumbling on her own horrors,
treading on her own shadow,
attempting to reach the occident with her
now routed, disordered army of shadows,
pursued by the light following close behind.
At last her fugitive step came within view
of the occident, and (recovered from her
defeat, regaining her valor in ruins),
in the half of the world undefended by
the Sun, the second time a
rebel, determines to be crowned once again,
while the fair golden mane of the Sun lit our
hemisphere, with just light and distributive
order, gave all things visible their colors,
restoring to the external senses their
function, the world illuminated with more
certain light, and I, awake.

48 An allusion to the alternation of darkness and light on opposite sides of the world.

PROLOGUE TO THE MYSTERY PLAY

DIVINE NARCISSUS

An Allegory



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Occident

America

Zeal

Religion

Music

Soldiers

SCENE I

(Enter OCCIDENT, an elegant Indian wearing a crown, and AMERICA at his side, an Indian noblewoman in the richly embroidered cloth and headdress worn when singing the tocotín.¹ They sit on two chairs; around them dance Indian men and women, holding the feathers and shells ordinarily used in this dance; as they dance, MUSIC sings.)

Music

Mexicans most noble,
whose ancient lineage
has its genesis in
the bright rays of the sun:
this is the blessed day,

¹ An Aztec dance with its accompanying music.

the day in all the year
when we pay homage to
our highest deity;
then come now, come adorned
with your emblems of rank,
join to your piety
your joy, let them be one;
in festive pageantry
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

And since prosperity
in all our provinces
is owed to him who brings
abundance, pious ones,
make offerings to him
for they are owed to him
of the first fruits, bounty
of the year's rich harvest.
Let the finest blood flow
from your veins, blend the blood,
so it may serve his cult;
in festive pageantry
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

*(OCCIDENT and AMERICA take their seats, and
MUSIC falls silent.)*

Occident

For among all the most high gods
solemnly adored in my rites,
so many deities that in
this famed, illustrious city
they number more than two thousand,
to him we offer in savage
unrelenting sacrifice hot
human blood spilled, entrails throbbing,
heart pulsating still, oh most cruel;
and though they number so many
(I say this again) my greatest
devotion is fixed upon him,
the highest of all the high gods,
exalted, the great God of Seeds.

America

And with reason, for this great god
alone upholds our beloved
realm, supporting our monarchy,
sustaining our kingdom with his
lush abundance of succulent
fruits; this benefit is supreme,
obscuring all other boons, since
it preserves the life that it makes
possible, and for this alone
we deem it most precious of gifts;

St.
Paul

M. J.

knowing that this is true, that his
benevolence watches over
us, his children, why would we care
that our mines, a bounty of gold,
make rich America richer,
if the miasma from those mines
turns fields barren, the fertile land
sown with seeds that once bloomed into
fruit, made desolate, a wasteland?
Then too, his divine protection
provides more than corporeal
food for us to eat. Afterward,
in precious viands sanctified,
formed from his own flesh (but purged first
of all bodily corruption)
he cleanses our souls of their stains.
And so, devoted to his cult,
let all of you repeat with me:

Occident, America, and Music

In festive pageantry,
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

SCENE II

*(They exit, dancing; enter the Christian RELIGION,²
a Spanish lady, and ZEAL,³ an armed captain general,
and behind them, Spanish SOLDIERS.)*

Religion

You are Zeal, and being Zeal, how
can your Christian fury bear to
see idolatry, false and blind,
celebrate with superstitious
cults an idol, a vile affront
to me, the Christian Religion?

Zeal

Religion: please do not complain
so quickly of my omission,
or lament my poor blandishments;
for my right arm now is upraised
and brandishing my sword, and I
shall avenge these wrongs, for your sake.
Withdraw, my lady, to one side
while I claim your rightful vengeance.

² Religion represents the missionaries.

³ Zeal represents the conquistadors.

*(Enter OCCIDENT and AMERICA, dancing, and
from the other side MUSIC and accompaniment.)*

Music

In festive pageantry
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

Zeal

They have come out; I shall approach.

Religion

I shall go too; pity moves me
to draw near (before your anger
charges them, enraged, for my sake)
and invite them, in peace and love,
to receive the truth of my cult.

Zeal

Then let us hurry, for now they
have begun their indecent rite.

Music

In festive pageantry
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

(ZEAL and RELIGION approach.)

Religion

Oh, most powerful Occident,
beautiful, rich America,
who live impoverished amid
these prodigal bounties of wealth:
put aside this blasphemous cult
incited by Satan himself.
Open your eyes! And now follow
my true belief, the one true faith,
persuaded by my Christian love.

Occident

Who are they, what strangers are these
I see before me? Oh heavens,
why do they wish to impede the
course of my joys and happiness?

America

What nations unheard of and strange
wish to counter the primacy
of my most ancient rule and sway?

Occident

Oh you, strange and foreign beauty,
oh you, a lovely rare pilgrim!
Tell me who you are and why you
come to trouble my jubilation.

Religion

I am the Christian Religion,
and I shall endeavor to turn
your provinces to my worship.

Occident

A fine avowal you demand!

America

A fine lunacy you intend!

Occident

What you contrive, impossible!

America

No doubt she is mad; just leave her,
and let our worship continue!

Occident, America, and Music

And in festive pageantry,
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

Zeal

How, most barbarous Occident,
and how, most blind idolatry,
can you disdain sweet Religion,
my dearly loved and gentle wife?

For you have already drained dry
the cup of your iniquities,
and our Lord God will not allow
you to continue your sinning,
and has sent me to punish you.

Occident

Who are you? The mere sight of your
face can strike fear deep in my heart.

Zeal

I am Zeal. Why are you surprised?
When all your excesses rebuff
Religion, my beloved spouse,
Zeal will appear to avenge her
by chastising your insolence.
A Minister of God am I,
and seeing that your tyrannies
have already gone so far, and
weary of seeing you live for
so many years in deep error,
He has sent me to punish you.
And therefore these mighty armed hosts,
vibrating thunderbolts of steel,
the ministers are of His wrath
and the instruments of His ire.

Occident

What God, what error, what offense,
what punishment do you proclaim?
I do not understand your words,
have no idea of your meaning,
or who you are that you dare to
interfere with the great task of
my people as they gather here
to recite as our cult demands:

Music

And in festive pageantry,
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

America

Barbarian, madman, blindly
with words none understands you wish
to perturb the serenity
that we enjoy in tranquil calm
and peace: cease and desist from
your puerile and hopeless efforts
or you will be reduced to ash,
and not even the winds will bear
news that you once lived! And you, spouse,

(To OCCIDENT.)

and your vassals, be deaf and blind

to his words, ignore, do not heed
his fantasies; proceed with your
righteous worship, do not allow
upstart foreign nations in their
insolence to interrupt you.

Music

And in festive pageantry
come worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

Zeal

Since the first proposal of peace
you have so haughtily turned down,
then the second, for war, you must
accept despite your arrogance.
Sound the call! To arms! This is war!

(Drums and bugles sound.)

Occident

What monstrosities has heaven sent
against me? What weapons are these,
such arms my eyes have never seen?
Ah, my guards! And you, my soldiers:
those arrows you always prepare,
now is the time to let them fly!

St.
Paul

Mad

America

What lightning bolts does heaven hurl
against me? What terrible orbs
of burning lead rain down like hail?
What monsters, hideous centaurs
do battle against my people?

(Offstage voices)

To arms, to arms! A war, a war!

(Instruments play)

Long live Spain! And long live her king!

(The battle is joined, and soldiers enter through one door and go out the other, the Indians fleeing and the Spaniards in pursuit; behind them, OCCIDENT retreats before RELIGION, and AMERICA before ZEAL.)

SCENE III

Religion

Surrender, haughty Occident!

Occident

Now your valor must conquer me
for I stand firm against mere words.

Zeal

Die, insolent America!

Religion

Wait, Zeal, wait, oh do not kill her,
for I need her to be alive!

Zeal

But how is it you defend her
when you are the one offended?

Religion

There can be no doubt: her conquest
fell to your valor, your prowess,
but what falls to me is mercy
and the pity to spare her life;
your charge, to conquer her by force,
but mine to vanquish her with words,
with the persuasive gentleness
of mild, invincible reason.

Zeal

You have seen the perversity
in their blind abomination
of your faith; is it not better
that all die?

Religion

Oh cease your justice,
Zeal: you must not, cannot kill them:
for I am by nature benign
and I do not want them to die
but to convert, and then to live.

America

If your request that I not die,
and this show of your compassion
are because, oh arrogant one,
you expect to conquer me first
with bodily weapons and then
with the arms of intellect, you
are mistaken, you are deceived;
for although I, a captive, weep
for my liberty, my free will
with even greater liberty
still will worship my deities!

Occident

I have already said that force
obliges me to cede to you;
this is true, but hear me: clearly
there is no force, no violence
that can hinder my will, keep it
from acting with total freedom;
and so, as your captive I moan,
but you cannot stop me, here, deep
in my heart, from proclaiming that
I worship and revere the great God of Seeds!

SCENE IV

Religion

But wait, what I tender to you
is not force but a mild caress.
Which God is the one you revere?

Occident

He is a God who makes fertile
the fields that produce our harvests;
before whom the heavens bow down,
and whom even the rains obey;
the same God who washes away

St.
Paul

Mad

our sins, no matter how vile, then
becomes the food he offers us.
Tell me if there can ever be
from the most loving deity
more benefits for humankind
than these I describe for you now.

Religion

Lord save me! What crafty designs
and devices, what mimicries
do these falsehoods intend toward our
holiest, our most sacred truths?
Oh wiliest of serpents, most
venomous of snakes! Oh hydra⁴
spewing out of your seven mouths
all the deadly hemlock of that
most noxious poison, lethal brew!
How far will this malice of yours
imitate and feign the holy
miracles of our one true God?
But with your own lies and deceit,
if God grants this skill to my tongue,
I shall most surely convince you.

⁴ Hydra, snake, and serpent all refer to Satan.

America

Oh, perplexed one, what is it you
envision? Do you not see? No
other God can confirm his works
and his wonders with benefits.

Religion

I must reason with the doctrine
of Paul, for when he preached to the
people of Athens he knew of
their law that mandated death for
any seeking to introduce
new gods to the city; he was
aware as well of the altar
dedicated "to an unknown
God," and declared these words to them:
"This is not a new deity,
no, this God I tell you about
is the unknown God you worship
and adore here at this altar."⁵
I shall do the same . . . Occident,
listen; blind idolatry, hear;
for all your good fortune lies in
heeding my words! Listen and hear.

⁵ Acts, 17:22-23.

St.
Paul

Madri

Those miracles you tell about,
those prodigies you have revealed,
those glimmers and rare features glimpsed
behind the veils of false belief,
the curtains of superstition;
those portents that you misconstrue,
attributing wondrous effects,
the works of the only true God
and of His infinite wisdom,
to your gods of mendacity.
For if the flowering meadow
is fertile, if fields are fruitful,
and if the fruit proliferates,
and if the sown fields grow and bloom,
and if the clouds distill the rain,
all is the work of His right hand;
neither the arm that cultivates,
nor the rain that fecundates,
nor the warmth that animates, none
of these could make the plants flourish
and grow without the presence of
His productive Providence that
gives the plants their vegetative
soul.

America

If all that you say is true,
tell me: is this deity so
benign that he will allow me
to touch him with my own hands like
the idol that my hands create,
using the seeds and the rivers
of innocent blood that is shed here,
spilled here, caught for this one cause here,
and for this sole effect alone?

Religion

Even though His essence divine
is invisible and immense,
it is already deeply joined
to our mundane, earthly nature,
and draws near us so humanly
that it allows the unworthy
hands of priests, but no others, to
approach the godhead and touch it.⁶

America

In this, then, you and I agree,
because as for my God, no one
at all is sanctioned or allowed

⁶ This speech of Religion refers to the Incarnation and the Eucharist.

to touch him save those who serve him
as priests; and not only may they
not touch him, but the common folk,
the laity, may not even
enter his sanctified chapel.

Zeal

Oh what reverence, more worthy
to be paid to our one true God!

Occident

Tell me this, although you tell me
other things too: is this God made
of matter as fine and as rare
as the red blood shed and offered
in sacrifice, as the seed that
is our sustenance and support?

Religion

I said this before: His divine
majesty is infinite, not
material; but His blessed
humanity, bloodless in the
holy sacrifice of the Mass,
makes use of pure white seeds of wheat
that then is transformed into His
very flesh, His very blood;

and His most precious blood, when caught
in the chalice, is the blood, pure
and innocent and pristine that,
offered on the altar of the
Holy Cross, is the salvation
and the redemption of the world.

America

Since you wish me to believe these
things that are unheard-of and strange,
can the deity you describe
be as loving as our God, the
one whom I adore, and offer
Himself to us as sustenance?

Religion

Yes, and all His divine wisdom,
for that aim and purpose alone,
dwells on earth among humankind.

America

And shall my eyes not see this God,
so that I may be persuaded,

Occident

and so that finally, at last,
my obstinacy will leave me?

Religion

Yes, you will see when you are washed
in the clear, crystalline fountain
of Baptism.

Occident

Oh yes, I know
that before I sit at the rich
table I must carefully wash,
for that is my ancient custom.

Zeal

That is not the kind of washing
demanded by the stains you bear.

Occident

What kind is it?

Religion

A sacrament
that like the living waters can
wash away and cleanse all your sins.

America

The brevity of the great news
you bring confounds me, and I would
like to hear this in detail once

more, for divine inspiration
moves me to want to fathom it.

Occident

And me; and to know of the life
and death of that resplendent God
who, you tell us, is in the bread.

Religion

All right, let us begin. First you
must know it is a metaphor,
an idea dressed in the colors
of rhetoric and visible
therefore to your eyes, as I shall
reveal to you; for I well know
you are more inclined to favor
objects that can be seen over
the words that faith can tell you;
and so, my friends, instead of ears
you need to use your eyes to learn
the teaching that faith will show you.

Occident

True: I would rather see it
than have you recount it to me.

SCENE V

Religion

Let us begin.

Zeal

Religion, please
tell me how you determine the
form to represent mysteries.

Religion

In an allegorical play
I wish to make them visible
so that she and the entire
occident will be instructed
in all that they have desired
to know.

Zeal

And what will you call the
play that you allegorize here?

Religion

Divine Narcissus, because if
unhappy America had

an idol she truly worshipped,
whose strange signs and traits the Demon
attempted to twist into a
feigned high mystery of our faith
—the Holy Eucharist—know too
that there have been among other
Gentile peoples other signs and
traces of so high a marvel.

Zeal

And where will your play be performed?

Religion

In the crowned city of Madrid,
the royal center of our faith,
and the most regal seat and throne
of their Catholic Majesties
to whom the Indies owe the holy
lights of our most Christian Scripture
shining bright in the occident.

Zeal

Do you see impropriety
in writing it in Mexico
and performing it in Madrid?

Religion

Do you mean you have never seen
a thing created in one place
that is of use in another?

Moreover, writing it was not
only a whim or mere caprice
but an act of due obedience
striving for the impossible.

And so the work, perhaps rustic
and rough, perhaps needing polish,
is the result of obedience,
not the child of audacity.

Zeal

Well then, tell me, Religion, now
that you have brought forth this play, how
do you avoid the complaint
that you introduce the Indies,
then wish to take them to Madrid?

Religion

Since the play intends only to
celebrate this high mystery,
and those who have been introduced
are simply no more than a few
abstractions that embody and

make visible what the play means,
nothing must be denied or changed
although I take them to Madrid:
for an intelligent species
no distances are a hindrance
and no oceans an obstacle.

Zeal

This being so, let us kneel before
the royal feet where two worlds meet
and most humbly beg for pardon;

Religion

and their bright, illustrious queen,

America

whose majestic, sovereign feet
the Indies do most humbly kiss;

Zeal

and her supreme noble councils;

Religion

her ladies who illuminate
their hemisphere;

America

and her wise men,
whom my poor wisdom humbly prays
to pardon and forgive its wish
to summon a great mystery
with these rough and clumsy verses.

Occident

Let us begin, for my longing
aches to see what the God is like
who will be served to me as food,

(AMERICA, OCCIDENT, and ZEAL all sing.)

saying that only now
do the Indies perceive
who the true God of Seeds
really is! And so we
say that with tender tears
distilled by our great joy,
let all gaily repeat
and raise rejoicing voices:

All

Oh let us bless the day
when we came to know the great true God of Seeds!

(Exit dancing and singing.)

A LETTER

FROM SOR FILOTEA¹

TO SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ



¹ The actual author was the Bishop of Puebla, don Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

SELECTED WORKS



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