

Idolatry's Allegorical Overcoming:

The *Loa* of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *El Divino Narciso*

Robert S. Oventile

Pasadena City College

[Abstract](#)

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Key Words: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Divine Narcissus*, Spanish Inquisition, Corpus Christi, allegory.

Palabras Clave: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *El Divino Narciso*, Inquisición española, Corpus Christi, alegoría.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote *El Divino Narciso* (*The Divine Narcissus*) in New Spain. Sor Juana's patroness, "Vicereine María Luisa de Laguna, countess of Paredes," took the play to Madrid in 1689 "for presentation there that year" in the Corpus Christi festivals that featured didactic plays on the Eucharist (Peters, Introduction xix). Sor Juana's play includes a *loa* and an *auto*. In seventeenth-century Spanish dramaturgy, a *loa* is "usually a preface to a comedy or religious play" that "introduces the themes of the longer play," the *auto* (xx). Both the *loa* and the *auto sacramental* of *El Divino Narciso* are highly allegorical. The *auto* allegorizes the Eucharist's theology by retelling Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo. Depicting the first encounter between the Aztecs and their Spanish conquerors, the *loa* depicts indigenous religion crossing paths with Spanish colonialism. Sor Juana portrays the Aztecs as becoming the first audience for the *auto*, which teaches them a new religion: Christianity. Idolatry's defeat and the Aztecs' conversion are not only Sor Juana's themes. Allegorically performing conversion and so textually enacting conquest's triumph, the *loa* is another event in the history to which it refers.

Highlighting relevant theological-political contexts, this essay details the intertwined workings of conversion and conquest in the minute allegorical particulars of *El Divino Narciso's loa*.

In the *loa's* first scene, “*la Religión Cristiana*” (Christian Religion), personified as a “*Dama Española*” (Spanish lady), accompanied by “*Celo*” (Zeal) personified as a “*Capitán General*” (Captain General) in armor, find “*el Occidente, Indio galán, con corona, y la América, a su lado, de India bizarra: con mantas y huipiles, al modo que se canta el Tocoín,*” worshipping a statuette made of seeds and human blood (*Loa* 6-7, 2-3).¹ These lines are Sor Juana's stage directions introducing *el Occidente* and *la América*. Comparing two translations of these directions may specify *el Occidente's* and *la América's* roles in *El Divino Narciso*. Here first is Peters and Domeier's translation: “Enter Occident, a gallant-looking Aztec, wearing a crown. By his side is America, an Aztec woman of poised self-possession. They are dressed in the *mantas* and *huipiles* worn for singing a *tocoín*” (3). To justify translating both “*Indio*” and “*India*” as the gender-neutral term “Aztec,” Peters and Domeier might reference their desire to take “into account the twentieth-century English-speaking audience” (xxix). But translating “*Indio*” and “*India*” as “Aztec” concedes too much to contemporary “multiculturalism” and so disassembles *El Divino Narciso's* dramatization of conquest for a seventeenth-century Spanish audience.

In contrast, Peden's translation underlines Sor Juana's use of the colonial terms “*Indio*” and “*India*”: “Enter OCCIDENT, a stately Indian wearing a crown, and AMERICA beside him, a noble Indian woman, in the *mantas* and *huipiles* worn when singing a *tocoín*” (197). The analytical import of translating “*Indio*” and “*India*” as “Indian” and “Indian woman” relates to the question: Which gaze registers the “noble” and “stately” “Indian[s]” in their “*mantas* and

huipiles”? Spanish colonial power’s gaze views that native dress, in which the “Indians” enter to hear a song praising their god.

Sor Juana’s emphasis on Occident and America’s noble bearing and native dress comports with the historically specific connotations of such bearing and dress in New World Corpus Christi festivals. In these festivals, on the Spaniards’ authority, members of conquered peoples participated in indigenous costumes that signified elite or noble status. Such costumes “served as sign[s] of ethnicity” that, in “the colonial context,” were signs “of subjugation” that contributed to the “successful performance of subjugated ethnic royalty” (Dean 51, 111). The uprooting of “idolatry” was crucial to the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Exhibiting a “fury against [...] native practices, against temples and idols, and against all manifestations of paganism,” the Church in Mexico carried out “the instructions of the Crown, which prescribed most emphatically the extirpation of every manifestation of idolatry” (Ricard 36). The “destruction of idols” and the extirpation of the “Indians’ sin of idolatry” were, for Spanish Christians, “instructive demonstrations of the powerlessness of the wicked gods to defend themselves against the agents of true religion” (Ricard 36, Mills 20). Seconding yet tempering the conquest’s violence was “a more patient and gradualist [...] evangelical stance” that sought to end idolatry by converting the “Indians” to Christianity (20).

In Zeal’s and Christian Religion’s eyes, Occident and America, colorfully dressed and praising “*al gran Dios de las Semillas*” (the great God of the Seeds), are idolatrous “Indian” nobles ripe for conquest and conversion (*Loa* 1.14). Denouncing the religious festival Occident and America celebrate as idolatrous, Religion and Zeal impose Christianity. After the “Indians’” military defeat, Religion proposes to finish the conquest of Occident and America by converting them to Christianity. Religion says she will effect this conversion by staging for the “Indians’”

what turns out to be *El Divino Narciso's auto*. But Sor Juana's primary audience, Catholics in Madrid attending Corpus Christi festivals, would be curious to see the dramatized conquest and conversion of exotically dressed "Indians."

European Corpus Christi festivals' theological-political valences inform *El Divino Narciso*. In the thirteenth century, on Pope Urban IV's order, "the Corpus Christi festival was instituted to affirm the controversial doctrine of transubstantiation, considered essential to the Roman Catholic faith, which held that Christ was embodied in the consecrated eucharistic host" (Dean 8). These festivals celebrating the Holy Eucharist "employed a vocabulary of triumph derived from Roman imperial ceremonies [...] Temporary triumphal arches and adorned processional paths were traditional visual cues that a victor was being heralded" (9).² The imperial Roman genealogy of the Corpus Christi celebrations, whose "ceremonial rhetoric of triumph was well suited for the Spanish conquest of the Americas," echoes in *El Divino Narciso's* dramatization of Spain's triumph over the "Indians" (Johnson 244).

In both Spain and New Spain, Corpus Christi festivals blended military triumph with theological triumphalism. Symbolizing the "triumph of Catholic doctrine," Corpus Christi festivals were "especially important in Spain, where the theological triumph of Catholicism over heretics and infidels paralleled Spain's physical conquest over the Moors in the late fifteenth century" (Johnson 244). Armed coercion echoed theological persuasion: "In 1551, the Council of Trent [...] issued a decree characterizing the feast of Corpus Christi as a 'triumph over heresy' and condemning anyone refusing to celebrate the Blessed Sacrament in procession" (Dean 8). During the festivals, all spectators had to acknowledge the "consecrated host as the supreme hero" representing "Christ as the supreme victor" (10-11). These festivals "manifested the

inextricable union of divine and royal, heavenly and earthly, religious and political authorities” (12).

Being “a festival of triumph, Corpus Christi required the symbolic presence of a vanquished foe,” the avatar of the “satanic forces” Christ subjugates (Johnson 244, Dean 15). The celebrations depicted the enemies European Christianity would overcome. Among those whom Catholic Spain targeted for theological-political defeat and exclusion were the Iberian Peninsula’s Jews. In Spanish Corpus Christi events, “people disguised as Moors and Jews played” the “festive opponent” (Johnson 244, Dean 15). In 1492, Isabella the First ordered all Jews expelled from Spain. Confronting persecution, some Jews pretended to convert to Catholicism in an attempt to hide their continuing secret adherence to Judaism. The Spanish Inquisition persecuted these Jews, called *marranos*, with special ferocity. The Inquisition defined *marranos* as heretics who, if discovered, must choose between conversion and immolation. Under the Inquisition, *autos de fé* (acts of faith), public trials “at which suspected heretics were either reconciled to the Church or sentenced to death by fire,” were inseparable from the representation of Jews as festive opponents in Corpus Christi festivals (Prinz 44). The Inquisition also pursued *marranos* in New Spain, where some had fled (Beller 2). But in New Spain, the Church also staged *autos de fé* to punish idolaters, and members of the conquered indigenous peoples became the festive opponents in Corpus Christi events (Ricard 270-3, Mills 30-33). For example, “in colonial Peru,” the festive opponent’s role “was played by native Andeans dressed in versions of their pre-conquest ceremonial garb” (Johnson 244).

Like Moors and Jews in Spain, indigenous idolaters appeared in New World Corpus Christi celebrations as the festive opponents over whom Christ triumphs. European anti-Semitism derives in part from Christian tradition’s interpretations of the apostle Paul’s complex

arguments that the Torah, the law, gives sin life so promises only death.³ The law's graven letters bring death, but, read allegorically, their figural meaning, the prefiguration of Christ, heralds salvation. Pauline allegory posits a set of binary oppositions (outer literal letter versus inner figural meaning, flesh versus spirit, sin versus grace, death versus life) to which European tradition added another: Jew versus Christian. Catholic Spain staged its relation to the New World's indigenous peoples in terms of European Christianity's abjection of Judaism and of the Torah as vehicles of the sin and death Christ triumphantly vanquishes. In the Spanish conquest, the fact that, by way of the notion of idolatry, "Indians" could substitute for Jews to become placeholders for the festive opponent is inseparable from Pauline theology's determination by the tropological system (golden calf/stiffnecked people) that Exodus elaborates yet ironically undoes.⁴

In Exodus, the Israelites figure God as a calf and so break the law against idolatry. Caught up in that figuration, God figures the Israelites as cattle that resist the law's yoke: God calls the Israelites a "stiffnecked people" and proposes to annihilate them (Exodus 32. 9-10). The Israelites idolatrously confuse God for a calf, but God ironically mirrors that idolatry by confusing the Israelites for cattle. God's judgment that the Israelites are "stiffnecked," that is, idolatrous, ironically partakes of the idolatry it condemns.⁵ Idolatry ruins the covenant relationship in both directions: the Israelites' relation to God and God's relation to the Israelites. To read Exodus as simply disclosing that the Israelites merely are idolaters who merit annihilation misses the text's irony and fails to account for God relenting his desire to commit genocide. Such a reading adopts God's genocidal mood, understanding the text from a perspective one character momentarily entertains. Neglecting Exodus' irony, and so leaving intact the figuration of the Israelites as idolaters, as if that figuration simply disclosed the

Israelites' being, Paul invented Christianity in interpreting Jesus as delivering the faithful from the law and so from God's wrath.

The *loa's* action and *El Divino Narciso's* rhetorical strategies of conversion iterate Exodus' tropological system ("golden calf" or idolatry/"stiffnecked people" or idolaters) by way of Paul's response to that system. Before ironically undercutting itself, this system posits idolaters as people who, in becoming genocidal wrath's target, become a people about to disappear: "And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Exodus 32.9-10). *El Divino Narciso's loa* substitutes the "Indians" for the Israelites God threatens to destroy for their idolatrous worship. Zeal's genocidal question to Religion paraphrases Exodus 32.9-10:

*Si has visto ya la protervia
con que tu culto abominan
ciegos, ¿no es mejor que todos
mueran?*

(But you have seen the stubbornness / with which these blind ones still abhor /
your creed; is it not better far / that they all die?) (*Loa* 3.218-21)

Impeding Spain's conquest of the New World, the idolatrous stubbornness Zeal wants Religion to "have seen" in the "blind ones" provokes Zeal to genocidal anger, in a replay of God's wrath against the Israelites.⁶ So "*protervia*" ("stubbornness") translates the Hebrew word for "stiffnecked." *Protervia* means before the way or path, but here also before Christ, who is the "way." America and Occident's "*protervia*" blocks the path of Christ's triumph.⁷ In *El Divino Narciso*, Occident and America begin as festive opponents idolatrously in the way.

Filled with genocidal wrath, Zeal adheres to the script of the scene Exodus narrates as having taken place at Sinai's base. Zeal wants Religion's gaze to "have seen" an idolatrous phenomenon (America and Occident's "*protervia*") that only actually occurs as an intertextual repetition of the figure Exodus' tropological system posits: "a stiffnecked people." In Exodus, God confuses the figural posit resulting from his ironic contamination with idolatry for a phenomenon: "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people" (Exodus 32. 9). Zeal repeats the confusion that prompted God's genocidal wrath against the Israelites. Exodus narrates yet ironically disarticulates the system of tropes by which that confusion takes place. In contrast, *El Divino Narciso* follows Paul in leaving that system of tropes intact and dispelling Zeal's wrath by overcoming idolatry allegorically.

Paul's invention of Christianity proceeds from Exodus' system of tropes by ignoring that system's ironic self-dismantling. For Paul, the Israelites are incorrigibly idolatrous, the law only underscores that they merit annihilation, and Christ alone can deliver them from God's wrath. Sor Juana extends Paul's understanding of and solution to the law/idolatry tension. That is, Sor Juana deploys the allegorical procedures by which Paul works with the Hebrew scriptures. To defuse Zeal's wrath and to overcome idolatry, the *loa*, in an allegorical *auto de fé*, spirits away the distinction between "the great God of Seeds" (*Loa* 1.14) and Christ in his Eucharistic manifestation.⁸ In so doing, the *loa* erases the distinctions between colonized and colonizer: both become one in Christ. Any Spaniards in Madrid enjoying the *auto* would substitute for the "Indians" (Occident and America) that the *loa* dramatizes as watching the play Religion stages: *El Divino Narciso*. This metadramatic *mise en scène* amends Paul as follows: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female [, there is no longer Indian or Spaniard, there is no longer colonized or colonizer]; for all of you are one in

Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28). As all become one in Christ, the *loa* masks, facilitates, and performs colonial subjugation's religious hierarchy.

When God threatens to destroy the Israelites as idolaters, Moses intercedes: “But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, ‘O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people [?]’” (Exodus 32.11). Following Paul's allegorical lead, Christian exegetes argued that Moses' gesture “prefigures” Christ's role in saving sinful humanity from divine wrath. Like Moses, Religion intercedes to save Occident and America from annihilation: “*Cese tu justicia, / Celo; no les des la muerte*” (Good Zeal, restrain / your justice, and do not kill them) (*Loa* 3.221-2). Religion proposes to save America by converting her to Catholicism. Backing Zeal's force, Religion uses reason and persuasion to complete the conquest: “[...] *mas el rendirla / con razón, me toca a mí, / con suavidad persuasiva*” (but now with reason / I, too, work to vanquish her, / but I shall win with soft persuasion) (*Loa* 3.215-17, Peden's translation).⁹

Since the “Indians” are “blind ones” benighted in idolatry, Religion must clothe her Eucharistic reasoning in persuasive allegorical images. These images are virtually indistinguishable from because prefigured in the idolatrous images America worships. Zeal asks Religion, “¿*Y cómo intitulas / el Auto que alegorizas?*” (What will you call / this play in allegory cast?) (*Loa* 5.423-4). Religion replies:

Divino Narciso, *porque*
si aquesta infeliz tenía
un Ídolo, que adoraba,
de tan extrañas divisas,
en quien pretendió el demonio,
de la Sacra Eucaristía

*fingir el alto Misterio,
sepa que también había
entre otros Gentiles, señas
de tan alta Maravilla.*

*(Divine Narcissus, let it be, / because if that unhappy maid / adored an idol which
disguised / in such strange symbols the attempt / the demon made to counterfeit /
the great and lofty mystery / of the most Blessed Eucharist, / then there were also,
I surmise, / among more ancient pagans hints / of such high marvels symbolized.)*

(Loa 5.425-34)

Blinding America to Christ, the indigenous “God of the Seeds” is Satan’s attempt to “counterfeit” the Eucharist. But that idolatrous seed-and-blood object prefigures the Eucharist ceremony’s bread and wine. And if such prefiguration could occur among New Spain’s “Indians,” how much more likely are the mythologies of other more ancient gentile nations (“*otros Gentiles*”) to allegorically house the Eucharist story? Religion picks Ovid’s tale of Narcissus and Echo to allegorize Eucharist theology in the *auto*.

Dramatizing the Eucharist to instruct America and Occident, the *auto* of *El Divino Narciso*, Religion’s drama, puts Paul’s allegorical strategy to work to redress the images the “Indians” worship. But, deploying Paul’s oppositions, this work of allegory begins in the *loa*. Zeal’s violence forces America and Occident to split the “God of the Seeds” into a prohibited literal outer idol and an inner figural image that evades Zeal’s enforcement of the commandment against idolatry. Or rather: Zeal’s force begins the institution of an opposition between a literal and a figural “God of the Seeds” that Religion’s play will complete.

Before Zeal and Religion appear, America and Occident worship and ingest an outer object of explicit physicality (*Loa* 1.15-28, 43-69). After America and Occident's military conquest, the two conquered "Indians" resist Religion's intent to convert them. America and Occident insist that they will continue to worship "the God of Seeds," but, being in Zeal's bondage, they may do so only in their hearts, which now enshrine an image of the prohibited object: the "idol" "God of the Seeds." Physically restrained from worshipping a outer physical object, Occident experiences an inner freedom of spirit: "*¡no me podrás impedir / que acá, en mi corazón, diga / que venero al gran Dios de las Semillas!*" (You cannot prevent / my saying here within my heart / I worship the great God of Seeds!) (*Loa* 3.244-46). Speaking aloud to Zeal and Religion, Occident says that they cannot muffle his heart's silent declaration of worship. Occident's outer, literal, bodily speech figures an inner, figurative, spiritual voice. Zeal might harm Occident's body, or even still its literal heart, but such violence never can still the voice in Occident's spiritual heart. This figural heart contrasts to the bodily heart, "*el corazón,*" ripped beating from the person America and Occident sacrificed to the "God of the Seeds" (*Loa* 1.33, 42). Moving from the sacrifice of an outer, literal, bodily heart to an inner, figural, spiritual heart, the worship Occident practices already starts to convert into "spirituality." Occident has begun to think of the "God of the Seeds" in terms of the theologically loaded oppositions that constitute and are constituted by Paul's allegorical reading of the Hebrew scriptures.

Zeal's violence results in America achieving a similar insight. Religion restrains Zeal from genocide, but America is wary:

*Si el pedir que yo no muera,
y el mostrarte compasiva,
es porque esperas de mí*

*que me vencerás, altiva,
 como antes con corporales,
 después con intelectivas
 armas, estás engañada;
 pues aunque lloro cautiva
 mi libertad, ¡mi albedrío,
 con libertad más crecida
 adorará mis Deidades!*

(If your petition for my life / and show of [compassion]¹⁰ / are motivated by the hope / that you, at last, will conquer me, / defeating my integrity / with verbal steel where bullets failed, / then you are sadly self-deceived. / A weeping captive, I may mourn / for liberty, yet my will grows / beyond these bonds; my heart is free, / and I will worship my own gods!) (*Loa* 3.226-36)

The opposition between “*armas*” “*corporales*” and “*intelectivas*” parallels the opposition between the object now barred as an idol and the image America and Occident spirit away in their own figural hearts. Imposing an outer physical imprisonment that houses an inner spiritual freedom, Zeal as conquistador preps America for conversion to a religion, Christianity, by a play, *El Divino Narciso*, whose allegorical strategies complete that work of conversion by performing Paul’s outer/inner, flesh/spirit, and literal/figural oppositions.

Religion’s allegorical procedures deploy these oppositions to refigure the Satan-produced counterfeit images Occident finds in his heart when he turns inward under the pressure of Zeal’s violence. Religion applies the distinction between literal idol and figural image to the “God of the Seeds” that Occident worships in his heart. When Occident tells Religion that she cannot

prevent him from declaring within his heart that he worships the “God of the Seeds,” she asks him, “¿*Qué Dios es ése que adoras?*” (What god is this that you adore?) (*Loa* 4.249). Occident replies by describing the images in his heart. Religion then says to herself:

*¡Válgame Dios! ¿Qué dibujos,
qué remedos o qué cifras
de nuestras sacras Verdades
quieren ser estas mentiras?*

(O God, help me! What images, / what dark designs, what shadowings / of truths
most sacred to our Faith / do these lies seek to imitate?) (*Loa* 4.261-4)

Here the complex dependence of Religion's allegory on Satan's devices emerges. *Dibujos* are designs, drawings, sketches, or pictures. Given that the word *dibujos* refers to written, drawn, or etched images produced by one kind of stylus or another, one could easily call *dibujos* graven images or idols. Religion leaves little doubt that she understands the images in Occident's heart specifically to be graven images. She insists that these “*dibujos*” are also “*cifras*.” *Cifra* is a cognate of the English word cipher. In Spanish, a *cifra* is the symbol for zero, a secret or occult manner of writing, or a monogram engraved on a seal or stamped on stationary. *Remedos* are imitations, copies, or mockeries. So an alternate translation of the opening of Religion's lament might be: “O God, help me! What graven images, / what mockeries, what empty signs [...]” The images of the “God of the Seeds” Occident worships in his heart are idolatrous, empty, zero-like ciphers, signs Satan graves (that are) demonically void of meaning.¹¹ In a falsifying, equivocating manner, these “*cifras*” mock or imitate the Eucharist's “*sacras Verdades*” (sacred Truths) (*Loa* 4.263, Peden's translation). Religion implores God's assistance to defeat these idolatrous images.

The idol “God of Seeds” provokes Zeal’s violence, which forces Occident to internalize his idol as an image. Religion finds that image still idolatrous. She deploys an allegorical strategy to spirit away that image’s idolatrous reference to a non-Christian deity. This process extends Zeal’s violence by rendering the image Occident worships an allegorical sign of Christ ever more internalized in a heart, Occident’s, that is to become ever more spiritual, that is, Christian. Full spirituality will arrive when America’s, Occident’s, and Zeal’s voices unite in singing the praises of the “God of the Seeds” as Christ’s allegorical prefiguration. Conquest will be secure when colonizer and colonized sing in harmony.

When Religion and Zeal first see America and Occident, Religion prompts Zeal’s genocidal wrath:

*¿Cómo, siendo el Celo tú,
sufren tus cristianas iras
ver que, vanamente ciega,
celebre la Idolatría
con supersticiosos cultos
un Ídolo, en ignominia
de la Religión Cristiana?*

(How, being Zeal, can you suppress / the flames of righteous Christian wrath /
when here before your very eyes / idolatry, so blind with pride, / adores, with
superstitious rites / an idol, leaving your own bride, / the holy faith of Christ
disgraced?) (*Loa 2. 73-9*)

However, as an allegorical figure, Zeal personifies not only militant righteousness, but also the God of Exodus, specifically the Yahweh who would kill all the Israelites, except Moses, as

idolaters. While Religion calls Zeal's wrath forth, when Zeal starts to unleash it, Religion asks him to have mercy. Zeal's interaction with Religion allegorizes the relationship between Judaism and Christianity that Paul invented: The law, the Torah, can only bring wrath; Christ's merciful grace redeems believers from the law. A personification of Christianity, Religion must find a way to deal with idolaters distinct from Zeal's.

Rather than destroying the idolatrous images in Occident's heart, Religion works with those very "*cifras*":

*¡Oh cautelosa Serpiente!
 ¡Oh Aspid venenoso! ¡Oh Hidra,
 que viertes per siete bocas,
 de tu ponzoña nociva
 toda la mortal cicuta!
 ¿Hasta dónde tu malicia
 quiere remedar de Dios
 las sagradas Maravillas?
 Pero con tu mismo engaño,
 si Dios mi lengua habilita,
 te tengo de convencer.*

(Oh, wily Serpent, sly Reptile, / oh, venom from the Viper's tooth! / Oh, Hydra, seven-headed beast / whose seven mouths spew, lethally, rivers of poison on our heads, / how far, and how maliciously, / can you continue in this way / God's sacred Miracles to mime? / Now if God will grace my tongue, / this same deceit I shall refine / and use your arguments to win.) (*Loa* 4.265-75, Peden's translation)

Satanically deceptive, the “*cifras*” in Occident’s heart are from the serpent in Eden, the most persuasive beast, having the smoothest tongue. But, by refining the images forming that very “same deceit” to produce sophisticated allegorical *dibujos*, Religion will win Occident and America away from idolatry. If God enables her “*lengua*,” tongue, or language to do so, Religion will defeat the serpent. This conflict is between Satan’s empty “*cifras*” and Religion’s God-inspired allegorical images, between the serpent’s tongue and Religion’s.

Noticing Occident and America’s continuing resistance, Religion realizes that she must proceed as Paul did among the Greeks:

*De Pablo con la doctrina
tengo de argüir; pues cuando
a los de Atenas predica,
viendo que entre ellos es ley
que muera el que solicita
introducir nuevos Dioses,
como él tiene la noticia
de que a un Dios no conocido
ellos un altar dedican,
les dice: “No es Deidad nueva,
sino la no conocida
que adoráis en este altar,
la que mi voz os publica.”*

(In doctrinal disputes, I hold / with the apostle Paul, for when / he preached to the
Athenians / and found they had a harsh decree / imposing death on anyone / who

tried to introduce new gods, / since he had noticed they were free / to worship at a certain shrine, / an altar to “the Unknown God,” / he said to them, “The Lord of mine / is no new god, but one unknown / that you have worshipped in this place, / and it is He, my voice proclaims.”) (*Loa* 4.280-92)

Religion claims that, in worshipping the “God of the Seeds,” the “Indians” unknowingly worship Christ in his Eucharistic manifestation. But the “Unknown God” and the “God of the Seeds” are the Christian God’s avatars only as allegorical figures. Worshipped without allegorical reference to Christ, the literal “God of the Seeds” remains an idol. Using force, Zeal ends such worship by inducing the internalization of the “God of the Seeds” as a figure in the heart. Religion works to purge that figure of any remaining idolatrous reference.

Understanding that she must use Paul’s allegorical strategy to persuade Occident and America, Religion tells them that the fertility¹² they celebrate as a blessing from the “God of Seeds” is actually the Christian God’s gift:

*¡Occidente, escucha;
oye, ciega Idolatría,
pues en escuchar mis voces
consisten todas tus dichas!
Esos milagros que cuentas,
esos prodigios intimas,
esos visos, esos rasgos,
que debajo de cortinas
supersticiosas asoman;
esos portentos que vicias,*

*atribuyendo su efecto
a tus Deidades mentidas,
obras del Dios Verdadero,
y de Su sabiduría
son efectos.*

(Listen, Occident! / and hear me, blind Idolatry! / for all your happiness depends /
on listening attentively. / These miracles that you recount, / these prodigies that
you suggest, / these apparitions and these rays / of light in superstition dressed /
are glimpsed but darkly through a veil. / These portents you exaggerate, /
attributing to your false gods / effects that you insinuate, / but wrongly so, for all
these works / proceed from our true God alone, / and of His Wisdom come to
birth.) (*Loa* 4.293-307)

Peters and Domeier's translation insightfully alludes to Paul's dictum: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13.12). America and Occident darkly see "*milagros*" (miracles) behind a *cortina* (veil). In Paul's writings, the word "veil" is a densely theological term. In the Jewish temple, a veil separates the worshippers from the covenant ark. This veil recalls the one Moses placed before his face to shield the Israelites from the glow remaining there from Moses' face to face colloquy with God on Sinai. For Paul, the veil signals that the Israelites, as the law discloses, are not worthy to see the afterglow of God in Moses' face. Paul allegorizes the veil as marking our subjection to law (Torah), which, only disclosing sin, blocks our access to God. When Christ dies on the cross, redeeming us from sin, the veil in the temple is rent (Luke 23.45), heralding the face to face relation with God we (will) have in Christ. Sor Juana's use of the term "*cortinas*" (veils), in Pauline terms, thinks of America and

Occident as Jews: a veil now blocks them from seeing God, but they will become Christians when Religion unveils the “God of Seeds” as Christ’s eucharistic manifestation.

America and Occident’s “God of the Seeds” only ceases to be a dark veil when Religion allegorizes that god as figuring the Eucharist. Religion contrasts Occident and America’s “*Deidades mentidas*” (false gods) to Christianity’s “*Dios Verdadero*” (true god). Religion abjects the literal outer seed and blood statuette as an idol to refigure the “God of Seeds” in Occident and America’s hearts as prefiguring Christ’s Eucharistic manifestation. This process constitutes an abjection because the very Eucharistic dynamic of Pauline allegory, by which outer signs (bread and wine, for example) become inner images (Christ’s body and blood, for example), redefines the “Indian’s” ceremonies as unknowingly Christian. Religion’s allegorical reading colonizes America’s and Occident’s worship and rituals. The “Indians,” reading their own religion allegorically, cast aside the idolatrous husk and know the Christian seed.

At the *loa*’s end, Occident and America, in song, name Christ the “God of the Seeds.” After stating his desire to see the *auto* that will teach him how Christ becomes spiritual food, Occident joins America *and Zeal* in song, as Sor Juana’s stage direction specifies:

*¡Vamos, que ya mi agonía
quiere ver cómo es el Dios
que me han de dar en comida,*

(Cantan la América y el Occidente y el Celo:)

*diciendo que ya
conocen las Indias
al que el Verdadero
Dios de las Semillas!*

(Let's go, for anxiously I long to see / exactly how this God of yours / will give
Himself as food to me. / [America, Occident, and Zeal sing:] / The Indies know /
and do concede / who is the true / God of the Seeds.) (*Loa* 5.486-90)

Religion has convinced America, Occident, and Zeal to find the phrase “God of the Seeds” to refer, not to an idol, but to Christ. With this shift of reference, the “God of the Seeds” fully becomes Christ’s allegorical prefiguration. The “Indians” may keep their god’s name because it no longer names their god. Zeal also endorses this change of reference because Zeal personifies the Hebraic deity who was willing to commit genocide against idolaters. Allegorized as Zeal, that deity reconfigures as a worshiper of the “true / God of the Seeds,” that is, as Christian. In effect, America, Occident, and Zeal are the festive opponents over whom Religion triumphs. Sor Juana thinks of the “Indians” in terms of the Jewish festive opponent, and when the “Indians” convert, Zeal, the figure allegorical of the specifically Jewish God, converts as well. By way of this double conversion, *El Divino Narciso’s loa* enacts a triumph over Jews and Judaism. When America, Occident, and Zeal sing as one, they become one in Christ.

As Sor Juana’s stage directions indicate, only after Zeal’s conversion does Religion join the *loa’s* final chorus:

Todos

¡Dichoso el día

que conocí al gran Dios de las Semillas!

(*ALL* / Blest be the day / when I could see / and worship the / great God of Seeds.)

(*Loa* 5.497-8)

Conocí is a form of the verb *conocer*, to know, so Peden translates the line cited above as follows: “Blessed the day / I came to know the great God of the Seeds!” Religion, America,

Occident, and Zeal know the “great God of the Seeds” as Christ. Peters and Domeier’s translation suggests that this allegorical knowing is also an act of seeing and worshipping: Zeal, Religion, America, and Occident sing as one in seeing and worshipping, in their hearts, the “God of the Seeds” as an eucharistic image of Christ. A complex allegorical reference masks as a phenomenal cognition. Singing together, Zeal, Religion, America, and Occident all implicitly say what Occident refused to stop saying: “*¡no me podrás impedir / que acá, en mi corazón, diga / que venero al gran Dios de las Semillas!*” (You cannot prevent / my saying here within my heart / I worship the great God of Seeds!)” (*Loa* 3.244-46). Having spirited away the anti-colonial defiance informing Occident’s statement, Religion joins America, Occident, and Zeal in becoming one. They all sing that they all worship, see, and know “the great God of the Seeds”: by this act of worshipful ocular knowledge, the distinction between colonized and colonizer disappears into an allegorically achieved oneness beneficial to Spanish colonialism. Religion’s Pauline strategy of conversion spirits the distinction between colonizer and colonized away, even as colonization proceeds. Correction: so that colonization may proceed.

Notes

¹ Unless indicated otherwise in parenthetical citations, this essay cites Peters and Domeier’s English translation of *El Divino Narciso*.

² In New Spain, such triumphal arches were also erected to welcome dignitaries (Dean 18-19). An example involving Sor Juana led to her writing *El Divino Narciso*. In “the year 1680 a new viceroy, the Count of Paredes, came to Mexico. The *cabildo* (town council) of the cathedral asked Juana to write a poem for one of the *arcos* (arches) erected in his honor” (Schons 46). The Count and Countess of Paredes became Sor Juana’s patrons, and they “encouraged her in her literary ambitions. It was for them that she wrote some of her best works” (46). Sor Juana wrote *El Divino Narciso* “at the request of her friend and patroness Vicereine María Luisa de Laguna, countess of Paredes” (Peters, Introduction xix).

³ For an introduction to Pauline allegory, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1994). For a discussion of the anti-Semitic legacy of Paul’s allegorical reading of the Hebrew scriptures, see Jeffrey S. Librett, *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jew and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000). See also my essay “Dialogue’s Impossibility: The Case of Jews and Christians in Germany.” Rev. of *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond*, by Jeffrey S. Librett. *The Review of Communication* 2.1 (2002): 56-61 <<http://www.natcom.org/roc/one-one/January2002/OventileonLibrett.htm>>.

⁴ I am accessing Paul de Man’s discussions of tropological systems. See Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996). See also my essay “Paul de Man, Now More Than Ever?” Rev. of *Material*

Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory, ed. Tom Cohen, et al. *Postmodern Culture* 11.3 (2001): 22 pars. 4 June 2001 <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.501/11.3.r_ventile.txt>.

⁵ For a detailed reading of the irony of the golden calf episode, see my essay "(Im)possible Reading: The Second Commandment and Moses' Delay." *Crossings* 5/6 (2001-2002): forthcoming.

⁶ Zeal's call for genocide iterates not only Exodus 32.9-10. This call also echoes debates over the fate of New Spain's indigenous peoples. In Spain, during the 1550s, leading scholars debated "the idea of the oneness of 'all humanity'" in relation to whether the "New World's" native peoples were or were not to be included in that "oneness" (Kirk 29). A participant in the debate appealed to the relation between genocide and idolatry in scripture: "Sepúlveda argued that, because in the Old Testament God destroyed idolatrous peoples, it was justifiable to wage war on the Indians, destroying their religious culture even before they were missionized" (Kirk 165, note 21).

⁷ America and Occident's "protovia" resonates with a feature of Corpus Christi festivals staged in Spain: "Spanish Christians, dressed as Moors, Arabs, or Turks, would attempt to impede the celebrations," only to have to give way before the triumphal procession (Dean 12). In fifteenth-century Murcia, a regulation gave Moors and Jews two options "in the street at the time of the procession, especially during the passing of the Body of Christ": "they could flee the streets and hide themselves, or kneel and demonstrate 'due respect'" (13-4).

⁸ In the *auto*, Sor Juana goes on to conflate the God of Seeds/Christ with Narcissus. In figuring Christ as Narcissus, Sor Juana follows an established strategy. Allegorizing pre- or non-Christian divinities as or in relation to Christ was, as Dean reminds us, a very common practice in European Christianity. As implemented in New Spain, such "practice[s] of substitution" were "nothing new to Europeans, who commonly associated Greek and Roman deities with members of the Christian pantheon. In fact, Greek and Roman deities made appearances in colonial [Corpus Christi] celebrations" (Dean 16). The analogy Sor Juana draws between the "great God of Seeds" and Christ in his Eucharistic manifestation conforms to official Catholic practice in the New World: "The ecclesiastic councils of Lima, 1551—1772, emphasized not eradication, but utilization of native religiosity and the careful application of substitutions. [...] The council ordered 'pagan' seasonal festivals associated with sowing, rain, and snow be refocused on temporally equivalent Christian celebrations" (16). In the *loa*, the "ritual described by Music, America, and Occident of forming the idol from the blood of human victims and seeds, breaking it, and eating it in small pieces parallels the Catholic Eucharistic service closely" (Peters, Notes 191).

⁹ Compared to Peden's translation of *Loa* 3.15-17, Peters and Domeier's translation downplays, even overlooks, Religion's sense that she is seconding Zeal's conquest of America. While Peden has Religion say, "I, too, work to vanquish her [America]," in Peters and Domeier's translation, Religion says to Zeal: "It was your part to conquer [America] / by force with military might; / mine is to gently make her yield, / persuading her by reason's light" (*Loa* 3.14-17).

¹⁰ In the lines "*Si el pedir que yo no muera / y el mostrarte compasiva*," Peters and Domeier translate "*compasiva*" as "Christian Charity." This translation assumes the conversion of America Religion sets out to perform but has yet to achieve. America does not yet know what Christian charity is. Religion introduces herself to America as "*la Religión Cristiana*," but America knows her only as the woman who prevented a stranger named Zeal from killing both Occident and America (*Loa* 2.120). Similarly, when Zeal introduces himself as God's minister come to punish sin, Occident replies: "*¿Qué Dios, qué error[?]*" (What god? What sin?) (*Loa* 2.156).

¹¹ Both Judaic and Christian polemics against idolatry define the idol as nothing, a non-entity, hence a "cipher."

¹² Idolatry attributes fertility to the wrong deity: Unlike God, the idols cannot give life. For a discussion of the links between the biblical polemic against idolatry and the issue of fertility, see my essay "Icons of the Human." Rev. of *Art and Fear*, by Paul Virilio. *Culture Machine, Reviews Section* (2003): 22 pars. 21 August 2003 <<http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk/Reviews/rev32.htm>>.

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