

LOA TO THE DIVINE NARCISSUS

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

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CHARACTERS

OCCIDENT	RELIGION	AZTECS
AMERICA	MUSIC	DANCERS
ZEAL	SOLDIERS	

SCENE ONE

OCCIDENT, a gallant-looking Aztec, wearing a crown. By his side AMERICA, an Aztec woman of poised self-possession. They are dressed in the mantas and huipiles worn for singing a tocothn. They seat themselves on two chairs. On each side, Aztec men and women dance with feathers and rattles in their hands, as is customary for those doing this dance. While they dance, MUSIC sings.

MUSIC:
O, Noble Mexicans,
whose ancient ancestry
comes forth from the clear light
and brilliance of the Sun,
since this, of all the year,
is your most happy feast
in which you venerate
your greatest deity,
come and adorn yourselves
with vestments of your rank;
let your holy fervor be
made one with jubilation;
and celebrate in festive pomp
the great God of the Seeds!

MUSIC:
Since the abundance of
our native fields and farms
is owed to him alone
who gives fertility,
then offer him your thanks,
for it is right and just
to give from what has grown,
the first of the new fruits.
From your own veins, draw out
and give, without reserve,
the best blood, mixed with seed,
so that his cult be served,
and celebrate in festive pomp,
the great God of the Seeds!

OCCIDENT and AMERICA sit, and MUSIC ceases.)

OCCIDENT: Of all the deities to whom
your rites demand I bend my knee—
among two thousand gods or more
who dwell within this royal city
and who require the sacrifice
of human victims still entreating
for life until their blood is drawn
and gushes forth from hearts still beating
and bowels still pulsing—I declare,
among all these, (it bears repeating),

whose ceremonies we observe,
the greatest is, surpassing all
this pantheon's immensity
the great God of the Seeds. 40
AMERICA: And you are right, since he alone
daily sustains our monarchy
because our lives depend on his 45
providing crops abundantly;
and since he gives us graciously
the gift from which all gifts proceed,
our fields rich with golden maize,
the source of life through daily bread, 50
we render him our highest praise.
Then how will it improve our lives
if rich America abounds
in gold from mines whose smoke deprives
the fields of their fertility 55
and with their clouds of filthy soot
will not allow the crops to grow
which blossom now so fruitfully
from seeded earth? Moreover, his
protection of our people far 60
exceeds our daily food and drink,
the body's sustenance. Indeed,
he feeds us with his very flesh
(first purified of every stain).
We eat his body, drink his blood, 65
and by this sacred meal are freed
and cleansed from all that is profane,
and thus, he purifies our soul.
And now, attentive to his rites,
together let us all proclaim: 70
OCCIDENT, AMERICA, DANCERS and MUSIC: We celebrate in
festive pomp,
the great God of the Seeds!

SCENE TWO

They exit dancing. Enter Christian RELIGION as a Spanish lady,
ZEAL as a Captain General in armor, and Spanish SOLDIERS.

RELIGION: How, being Zeal, can you suppress
the flames of righteous Christian wrath
when here before your very eyes
idolatry, so blind with pride, 5
adores, with superstitious rites
an idol, leaving your own bride,
the holy faith of Christ disgraced?
ZEAL: Religion, trouble not your mind
or grieve my failure to attack,

AMERICA: What lightening bolts does heaven send
to lay me low? What molten balls
of burning lead so fiercely rain?
What centaurs crush with monstrous force
and cause my people such great pain?
(*Within.*) To arms! To arms! War! War!

(*Drums and trumpets*) sound.)

(*Within.*) Long life to Spain! Long live her king!

(*The battle begins. Indians enter through one door and flee through another with the Spanish pursuing at their heels. From back stage, OCCIDENT backs away from RELIGION and AMERICA retreats before ZEAL's onslaught.*)

SCENE THREE

RELIGION: Give up, arrogant Occident!

OCCIDENT: I must bow to your aggression,
but not before your arguments.

ZEAL: Die, impudent America!

RELIGION: Desist! Do not give her to Death;
her life is of some worth to us.

ZEAL: How can you now defend this maid
who has so much offended you?

RELIGION: America has been subdued
because your valor won the strife,
but now my mercy intervenes
in order to preserve her life.

It was your part to conquer her
by force with military might;
mine is to gently make her yield,
persuading her by reason's light.

ZEAL: But you have seen the stubbornness
with which these blind ones still abhor
your creed; is it not better far
that they all die?

RELIGION: Good Zeal, restrain
your justice, and do not kill them.
My gentle disposition deigns
to forbear vengeance and forgive.
I want them to convert and live.

AMERICA: If your petition for my life
and show of Christian charity
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!

OCCIDENT: Forced to surrender to your power,
I have admitted my defeat,
but still it must be clearly said
that violence cannot devour
my will, nor force constrain its right.
Although in grief, I now lament,
prisoner, your cruel might

has limits. You cannot prevent
my saying here within my heart
I worship the great God of Seeds!

45

SCENE FOUR

RELIGION: Wait! What you perceive as force
is not coercion, but affection.

What god is this that you adore?

OCCIDENT: The great God of the Seeds
who causes fields to bring forth fruit.

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To him the lofty heavens bow;
to him the rains obedience give;
and when, at last, he cleanses us
from stains of sin, then he invites
us to the meal that he prepares.

10

Consider whether you could find
a god more generous and good
who blesses more abundantly
than he whom I describe to you.

RELIGION: (*Aside.*) O God, help me! What images,
what dark designs, what shadowings
of truths most sacred to our Faith
do these lies seek to imitate?

15

O false, sly, and deceitful snake!

O asp, with sting so venomous!

20

O hydra, that from seven mouths
pours noxious poisons, every one
a passage to oblivion!

To what extent, with this facade
do you intend maliciously

25

to mock the mysteries of God?

Mock on! for with your own deceit,
if God empowers my mind and tongue,
I'll argue and impose defeat.

AMERICA: Why do you find yourself perplexed?

30

Do you not see there is no god
other than ours who verifies
with countless blessings his great works?

RELIGION: In doctrinal disputes, I hold
with the apostle Paul, for when
he preached to the Athenians

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and found they had a harsh decree
imposing death on anyone

who tried to introduce new gods,
since he had noticed they were free

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to worship at a certain shrine,
an altar to "the Unknown God,"
he said to them, "This Lord of mine
is no new god, but one unknown
that you have worshipped in this place,
and it is He, my voice proclaims."

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And thus I—

(OCCIDENT and AMERICA whisper to each other.)

Listen, Occident!
and hear me, blind Idolatry!
for all your happiness depends
on listening attentively.
These miracles that you recount,

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SCENE FIVE

RELIGION: Then come.

ZEAL: Religion, answer me:
what metaphor will you employ
to represent these mysteries?

RELIGION: An *auto* will make visible
through allegory images
of what America must learn
and Occident implores to know
about the questions that now burn
within him so.

ZEAL: What will you call
this play in allegory cast?

RELIGION: *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.

ZEAL: Where will your drama be performed?

RELIGION: In the crown city of Madrid,
which is the center of the Faith,
the seat of Catholic majesty,
to whom the Indies owe their best
beneficence, the blessed gift
of Holy Writ, the Gospel light
illuminating all the West.

ZEAL: That you should write in Mexico
for royal patrons don't you see
to be an impropriety?

RELIGION: Is it beyond imagination
that something made in one location
can in another be of use?
Furthermore, my writing it
comes, not of whimsical caprice,
but from my vowed obedience
to do what seems beyond my reach.
Well, then, this work, however rough
and little polished it might be,
results from my obedience,
and not from any arrogance.

ZEAL: Then answer me, Religion, how
(before you leave the matter now),
will you respond when you are chid
for loading the whole Indies on

a stage to transport to Madrid?
RELIGION: The purpose of my play can be
none other than to glorify
the Eucharistic Mystery;

and since the cast of characters
are no more than abstractions which
depict the theme with clarity,
then surely no one should object
if they are taken to Madrid;
distance can never hinder thought
with persons of intelligence,
nor seas impede exchange of sense.

ZEAL: Then, prostrate at his royal feet,
beneath whose strength two worlds are joined
we beg for pardon of the King;

RELIGION: and from her eminence, the Queen;
AMERICA: whose sovereign and anointed feet
the humble Indies bow to kiss;

ZEAL: and from the Royal High Council;

RELIGION: and from the ladies, who bring light
into their hemisphere;

AMERICA: and from
their poets, I most humbly beg
forgiveness for my crude attempt,
desiring with these awkward lines
to represent the Mystery.

OCCIDENT: 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.
In loving tears
which joy prolongs
we gladly sing
our happy songs.

ALL: Blest be the day
when I could see
and worship the
great God of Seeds.

(They all exit, dancing and singing.)

