

*La semilla y la cizaña*. Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

Ed. Davinia Rodríguez. Autos Sacramentales Completos 86; Teatro del siglo de oro 193. Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2014. 266 pp. €58.

In the mid-seventeenth century Calderon de la Barca wrote and staged some eighty *autos sacramentales*. These theatrical pieces vividly capture the deep and intricate connections between popular and elite cultures in early modern Spain. *La semilla y la cizaña*, the parable of the seed and the weed, is typical of the genre: a deeply learned theological play on the mysteries of transubstantiation to be consumed in revelry by the populace during massive urban Corpus Christi celebrations. Autos incorporated sophisticated props and scenography when staged at court. Plays circulated in print and manuscripts throughout Spain well into the mid-eighteenth century. On the surface, *La semilla* appears as a simplistic theatrical representation of three of Christ's agrarian parables (Mathew 13:1–43; Luke 8:4–15; Mark 4:1–20): a lord who comes back to demand tithes from four servants charged with cultivating four different types of land. Calderon, however, draws upon the Old Testament, pagan classics, and cosmography to create an involved plot to justify hatred of Judaism and Islam and ultimately assert a Catholic global empire.

The character of Christ is both seed and farmer (Sembrador). He travels in a ship (Mary's womb, an immaculate container) with Lucero (John the Baptist) and Inocencia. On land there are four continents, religions, and demons waiting for Sembrador and his crew. The continents have all vast, empty territories awaiting cultivation. Calderon uses Cesare Ripa's Renaissance iconography to characterize each. The continents, however, have overlords (*mayorales*). Asia belongs to Judaismo, Africa to Islam (Paganismo), "Europa" to Roman Paganism (Gentilismo), and "América" to Idolatría. Of all the overlords, Europe's Roman Paganism is the most willing to contemplate the doctrine of

transubstantiation. Paganismo, paradoxically, is too lackadaisical to care. Idolatría has shifting attention as he repeatedly falls in love with Inocencia and the demon Cizaña (more on him later). Judaismo is by far the most complex character in the play. He is drawn to Sembrador, as every single aspect of Christ's persona and message had been prefigured in the Judaic Old Testament. Yet at the same time, Judaismo revolts against the idea that a man could have been conceived by a woman and be God. He is also deeply troubled by Christ's duality as both seed and farmer, as both bread and body.

In typical Spanish agrarian fashion, each *mayoral* has *conciertos* (sharecroppers) to do the actual manual labor. The play opens with a dialogue among four demons, four deadly natural forces — frozen northern winds (Cierzo), mist (Niebla), locust (Ira), and weed (Cizaña) — who agree to disguise themselves as *conciertos* and block Sembrador's plan if Christ were to succeed and collect harvest. All four simpleton *mayorales* hire demons: Judaism hires Cierzo, Islam hires Ira, Roman Paganism hires Niebla, and Idolatry hires Cizaña. The few seeds that transform themselves into wheat in each continent are ultimately destroyed by these demons. America's Idolatry falls in love with his own *concierto*, who happens to be the Devil himself, Cizaña. The bountiful gardens of America are in fact deceiving false gardens with beautiful flowers that had become useless *cizaña* weeds: *neguilla* (*agrostemma githao*). Roman Paganism oversees a good harvest, which at the very end is ruined by a rot triggered by mist. The play ends when Judaismo kills Sembrador and the other three *mayorales* run haplessly to defend Christ. The earth is overtaken by darkness until Sembrador resurrects. Each of the four continents then ban Judaismo, who therefore becomes a shiftless wanderer.

Rodríguez, the editor, does a good job at establishing a reliable text by glossing and collating fourteen extant manuscripts and three printed editions. She also provides useful footnotes identifying arcane early modern terms and veiled Old Testament and New Testament references within the auto. The apparatus, however, lacks any type of critical engagement with the text itself, the historical context in which it was produced, or the culture that made possible such ferocious anti-Semitism and providential imperialism. She seems unaware of the deep irony of this and other autos: Calderon's exquisite knowledge of the most arcane passages of the Old Testament as prefiguration of Christ and Christianity was relentlessly deployed to justify hatred of those who created the Old Testament in the first place.

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