

Esther in Iberia & Constructing a Catholic Nation upon the Judeo-Christian Model

In this chapter, I explore how the Esther story is presented and performed for the majority Catholic populace in early modern Spain. In the nascent, post-expulsion Spanish Empire, this story was used to promote contemporary values of homogeneity and exclusion. I explore how it was part of a rhetorical strategy employed by the empire to uphold values considered crucial to the regime including female virtuosity, obedience to the king and the opportunities afforded to those loyal to the monarchy. The Esther story was used as an early modern rhetorical tool to elevate public opinion and garner popular support through visual arts in the three-piece tapestry series “Esther and Ahasueros” (1490)¹ and the religious theatrical genre in two Iberian *autos sacramentales*: *Auto del Rey Asuero quando desconpuso a Basti* [Auto when King Ahasueros Undid Vashti] and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando ahorco a Aman* (1501) [Auto when King Ahasueros Hung Haman]. The tapestries today are displayed in the *Catedral de la Seo* [La Seo Cathedral]

¹The series “Esther and Ahasueros” is composed of three tapestries. The individual panels were given a title by the authors of the text *Los tapices de la Seo de Zaragoza* [Tapestries of La Seo in Zaragoza]; published in 1985 thanks to editors Eduardo Torra de Arana, Antero Hombria Tortajada and Tomás Domingo Pérez. This is the most complete study to date of the entire collection of tapestries in La Seo. I will refer to these panels using their titles: Fig. 2.1 *Banquete de Asuero y degradación de la reina Vasti* [Banquet of Ahasueros and the Degradation of Queen Vashti], Fig. 2.5 *Exaltación de Ester al trono de Persia* [Esther is Elevated to the Persian Throne] and Fig. 2.9 *Ester salva a su pueblo* [Esther Saves her People].



Fig. 2.1 Banquet of Ahasueros and the Degradation of Queen Vasti

in Zaragoza, Spain and the unpublished *autos* are located today in the *Biblioteca Nacional Espanola* [National Spanish Library] in Madrid, Spain.

The tapestries “Esther and Ahasueros” comprise a three-piece artistic retelling of the Book of Esther. They closely follow the biblical story and in painstaking detail illustrate the tale in a way that is accessible to a wide audience. Woven in wool and an abundance of silk the three panels that comprise the series measure (1.1) 432×820 cm, (2.1) 430×770 cm, and (3.1) 395×800 cm (Delmarcel 62–63). These sumptuous tapestries were created as part of a larger tradition of sixteenth-century biblical woven arts in the Flemish workshop of Tournai, Belgium. Woven on low warp looms, the panels display rich and vibrant colors including a predominance in blue and red, although cream, purple, orange, black, white, gray, and yellow are also present. Each panel took about 16 months to complete by a team of four weavers. Incredibly, they were woven from the backside as weavers would use a mirror to complete their task. Created in the workshop of Tournai, they reflect the style of the Burgundy court that was in power at that time. Each panel contains Latin passages woven in banderoles above the scenes. These little

banners narrate the story and help guide the spectator through the rich and complex visual field. Although each of the main characters including Ahasueros, Esther, Vashti, Mordechai, Haman, and Zares are labeled so that the viewer is able to quickly recognize the primary actors and distinguish them from the rest of the many background characters. There is a dynamic interplay between the written text and the image—the image has primacy. Each panel represents between three and five different scenes.

The series is definitively traced to a workshop in Tournai; however, there is no signature as found in later Flemish tapestries. The origins of the lost cartoons and models that the tapestries were based upon are unknown, as is the exact date of their creation. However, scholars including Guy Delmarcel have shown that the tapestries reflect the sartorial trends of the period around 1475 and thus have dated the series 1490 (61). We do not know if these tapestries were commissioned or purchased after their fabrication, which adds to the mystery regarding the origins of these tapestries. We do know that they were bequeathed to *La Seo* in Zaragoza by Archbishop Don Alonso de Aragón upon his death in 1520 thanks to the 1521 inventory that details the donation. They also demonstrate the material interaction between Iberia and Northern Europe in this period; the more austere Catholic monarchy emulated many of the artistic trends found in Northern Europe especially in textiles and sartorial tendencies.² We must also remember that Flanders was under Spanish Hapsburg rule with Emperor Carlos V at this time. The tapestries carefully present how the Spanish royalty imitated the Burgundian court. Sixteenth-century Flemish tapestries represent the pinnacle of early modern tapestry art. Among this elite group, the series “Esther and Ahasueros” has been credited as one of the best examples of these early modern tapestries.

Flemish tapestries featured prominently within the early modern Spanish landscape and records detailing their origins can be found in the inventories of many royal families and religious institutions. As noted, Don Alonso de Aragón, the illegitimate son of Catholic King Ferdinand, bequeathed this series to the Cathedral of Zaragoza in 1520. We can see the twofold importance of the tapestries for elite families; they provided

²According to Marie-Louise Plourin, Felipe “El Hermoso” and Juana “La Loca” who lived in the Low Countries, liked to send tapestries that were richly decorated to her Castilian mother Isabel la Católica (77).

warmth in the winter and were a key decorating element as the royals moved between castles. Marie-Louise Plourin explains that “hasta el siglo XVIII los castillos reales no se amueblaron de un modo permanente. El tapiz era un elemento esencial cuando se trataba de alegrar grandes residencias que debían habilitarse apresuradamente” (15). [until the eighteenth-century, royal castles were not permanently furnished. Tapestries were an essential element through which large residences could be quickly personalized and decorated] (*my translation*).

We find that, like many other tapestries, their life in Iberia began in the possession of a noble person—in this case, Don Alonso de Aragón. Resulting from the bequeathal to *La Seo* upon the archbishop’s death, the display of this series was uninterrupted for the Spanish people for the next 500 years. Crucially many of these visual pieces were obtained just at the moment when the nascent Spanish nation was working to shape the identity of its empire and its people. Every Holy Week (or *Semana Santa*), these tapestries were taken out and displayed on the walls of the *La Seo* until the turn of the twentieth-century. Some of the tapestries within the collection would even be used to decorate the exterior walls of the cathedral. The festival period of *Semana Santa* has particular import within the Catholic Church at the dawn of post-reformation Iberia. Spanning festivities throughout the last week of Lent and ending with Easter, during this period processions and floats, would populate cities throughout Spain and congregations would attend church with additional frequency. Zaragoza has a long tradition of celebrating the Holy Week. *Cofradías* or brotherhoods would put on dramatic performances and elaborate parades throughout the city. Their story and message continues to be transmitted as part of a national imaginary and discourse that unites the church and state. Today the tapestries are publicly viewable year round, thanks to the 1995 inauguration of the *Museo de la Seo* [La Seo Museum] also located in the *Catedral de la Seo*. For the purposes of this study, I am principally interested in how these stories were employed for the populace in Zaragoza and amidst the newly formed Iberian nation just around the time of Don Alonso’s death in 1520.

As I analyze the different Esther stories alongside each other, I show how various retellings reveal different ideas based upon the context in which they emerged. Each of these retellings becomes an original narrative of the source biblical text, as such revealing the didactic potential of art. These retellings and vernacular stories make sense in the society and

the context in which they are produced. In comparing these works, it is important to recall that “translation narratives are temporal narratives, translations unfold within time” (Seidman 10). As I interpret these different ‘emplotments,’ the tapestries and the *autos* use the Esther story primarily to promote obedience to the regime of the Catholic Kings.

QUEEN ESTHER IN TAPESTRIES “ESTHER AND AHASUEROS”

The tapestry known as “Esther and Ahasueros” is recorded as follows in the 1521 *Inventario de la Sacristía de la Seo* [Inventory of the Sacristy of la Seo]: “Primeramente su Illustrisimo Señorío dió 3 paños grandes de raz en donde hay mucha seda con la hystoria del Rey Asuero y de la reyna Hester toda la hystoria” (325). [Firstly your Illustrious lordship gave 3 woven panels in which there is a lot of silk telling story of King Ahasueros and the Queen Esther and the whole story] (*my translation*). The series of three tapestries are also known today by the title “Ester and Ahasueros.”³ The early sixteenth-century inventory is recorded within a large format, leather, and wood-bound book and is located in the archives one floor down from the museum where the tapestries are displayed (Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11). The inventory presents the series of tapestries both in the central index and later in more detail as a longer entry. First, we read in the index: “Paños de raz del Ilmo e Rmo Sor Don Alonso de Aragon dados a la Yglesia de Çaragoça, el qual falleció a XXIII de Febrero, 1520” (CXVI). [woven panels from the most Illustrious and Revered, Reverend Don Alonso de Aragón, who died on the 13 of February, 1520, having donated them to the church of Zaragoza] (*my translation*). As acknowledged previously, we can only speculate regarding the origins of these tapestries, i.e., if they were commissioned or purchased after their fabrication. However, given the inventory, we can be certain that Don Alonso de Aragón donated these tapestries to the Sacristy of *La Seo* and we also know that he held them in his private collection before his death. Likewise, we can only speculate as to whether they were displayed

³This series title was also provided by the editors, Eduardo Torra de Arana, Antero Hombría Tortajada, Tomás Domingo Pérez, of *Los tapices de la Seo de Zaragoza* (1985). To date, this has been the most complete study of the full set of tapestries located in *La Seo*. According to these editors and art historian and author of *Flemish Tapestry*, Guy Delmarcel, the tapestries were created in 1490.



Fig. 2.2 Banquet detail

in the Archbishop's Palace, *El Palacio arzobisbal*, in which Don Alonso resided or in the church. We can however say with confidence that these tapestries were cultural and religious items of significant value in his life. As Don Alonso de Aragón was archbishop in Zaragoza at the time of his death and held one of the most important positions in the city, he shaped the worldview of many Castilian subjects through his religious vocation and connection to the crown.

The extant series of three magnificent tapestries have always been kept and displayed together and tell the complete Esther story (Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11).⁴ We also know that over the past 500 years the series was displayed every Holy Week on the interior walls of the *Catedral de la Seo*. They became part of the religious landscape and cultural imaginary of the masses in Zaragoza as they were available for all to see and interact with in their worship. In 1995, the

⁴Some scholars speculate that there was a fourth panel that is missing that detailed Haman and his sons' demise.



Fig. 2.3 Vashti declines the king's invitation



Fig. 2.4 Vashti is banished

Museo de la Seo was inaugurated and began to formally display the tapestries year round. The first gallery of the museum is dedicated strictly to the series of panels which tell the Esther story. The other tapestries displayed in the museum are also large format.

The tapestries have both a didactic and propagandistic purpose. As they garnered a mass audience during the Holy Week when the whole of Zaragoza would spend time in the cathedral, they held broad popular appeal. They are clearly divided into different block segments, and are interpreted from left to right. The tapestries privilege the visual genre, although the *banderoles* do narrate the story.⁵ This is due both to the fact that the size of the image far exceeds that of the *banderoles*, and the fact that they were written in Latin. Whereas the only written text in the tapestries is in Latin, all the other texts that I am analyzing in this project are written in the Castilian vernacular that was used throughout the Spanish

⁵The Latin with Castilian and English translations for each of these *banderoles* appears in the appendix.



Fig. 2.5 Esther is Elevated to the Persian Throne

Empire and the Sephardic Diaspora. We must remember at the time when the tapestries were obtained by *la Seo* in 1520, the Burgundian court was under Spanish rule by Habsburg Emperor, Carlos V. Since they were created in Northern Europe, Latin would have been a common language for all Catholics. The majority of the population during this period was illiterate and so the textual portion would only be directed at a small elite audience. We will later discuss the reception of these material artifacts given they had a dual ideal viewer. As these tapestries were incredibly sumptuous and expensive items they could only have been purchased by the very elite.

The many figures are woven in rich detail; the audience can clearly see folds in the patterned dresses of the women. Each figure is highly personalized and throughout the scenes changing facial expressions reflect the narrative. They also present a variety of gestures and body language that indicate pleasure, displeasure and at times concern. Present amidst the central actors are a multiplicity of background details. These include landscapes, views of the city and even draw the viewer towards the surrounding countryside. The visual field is populated by many figures that do not have a specific role but help locate the narrative within its respective space. According to Torra de



Fig. 2.6 Mordechai is knighted



Fig. 2.7 Esther at court

Arana, Hombría Tortajada, and Domingo Pérez, it is difficult to find a more perfect example of portraits, attitudes, and character in the Flemish epoch and style of Tournai than is present in this series of exceptional tapestries.⁶

The tapestries were donated just a mere 20 years after the expulsion of the Jews and the advent of policies of exclusion. In this story that is used typically to celebrate a Jewish heroine, we see other aspects highlighted in this visual retelling. Many of the ideas promulgated clearly project an opulent empire, reflect the ultimate power that the king wields, and highlight the disciplining of subjects that do not conform to

⁶“Merced al aprovechamiento de todas las peculiaridades del tejido y utilizando con suprema sabiduría las diversas tonalidades se han podido conseguir una gallería de tipos, retratos y actitudes que difícilmente puede encontrarse con mayor perfección en las numerosas colgaduras flamencas de la época y estilo de Tornai” (106). [Thanks to how artists took advantage of all the particularities of the threads and through their supreme knowledge of the different tones they were able to achieve a gallery of types, portraits and attitudes. One would be hard pressed to find a finished product realized with better quality than in the many Flemish tapestries from this time period and in the style of Tournai.] (*my translation*).



Fig. 2.8 Marriage of Ahasueros and Esther



Fig. 2.9 Esther Saves Her People

royal policies. The tapestries present a particular narrative of empire that upholds a strong monarchy and centralized power, present the values of obedience and a homogenous regime, and traditional gendered norms of passive female figures. They also present a visual image that is consistent with a Northern European landscape and present figures that look like Northern European subjects including a blond Esther. Given these considerations, the tapestries are a useful visual representation of the Esther story and were gazed upon by many Spanish citizens over the past 500 years. Now let us explore each of the panels in detail.

PANEL 1: BANQUETE DE ASUERO Y DEGREDACIÓN DE LA REINA VASTI (432 × 800 CM)

The first and most prominent scene in *Banquete de Asuero y degradación de la reina Vasti* (Fig. 2.1) details the elaborate feast held by King Ahasueros. Seated in the center of a large table, Ahasueros is surrounded by his courtly figures. We see this scene highlighted in the first Latin inscription: “The King Ahasueros offered a large banquet for all of his generals to show the



Fig. 2.10 Esther goes before the king



Fig. 2.11 Esther's banquet

richness and splendor of his reign (Panel 1).” We see presented in the tapestry in exquisite detail gilded salt, pepper, and spice holders that adorn the extra-large table (Fig. 2.2). The banquet is the primary and largest scene in this panel. All of these individual elements have been carefully considered and selected in order to tell a story of opulence and power. In this strictly male scene, different servants have distinct purposes: the wine pourers ceremoniously pour the wine and the poultry carver carefully displays his various knives ready to begin his task. Seated to the left and right of the king are other male court figures. Also standing behind him are other participants at court. This panel sets the tone for the entire series as it establishes a lavish empire and prominently displays the wealth that is regulated by the king. It demonstrates the Persian Court and presents King Ahasueros through the lens of many of the stylistic influences that reflect the late fifteenth-century Flemish court. This panel also helps illustrate how the Iberian Empire led by Carlos V aspired to be seen in the early modern period. Given that Carlos V (also known as Carlos I) was ruler of the Spanish and Holy Roman Empires and Hapsburg Netherlands, he held much power and influence in early modern Europe and would have been depicted highlighting these aspects. It sets the tone for many of the other retellings that we will consider in this book and especially later in this chapter as we will see in the strictly Iberian genre of the *autos sacramentales*.

Continuing on from left to right, we next see in this panel that Vashti rejects the king’s invitation to attend his banquet (Fig. 2.3). Vashti is wearing an opulent crown and is elevated in the tapestry, she is seated on her throne with her ladies in waiting at her feet. She makes a clear gesture of refusal with her left hand. Some biblical scholars regard Vashti’s refusal as a subversive act in the patriarchal order and consider her figure to be the only dissident female voice in this story, however as we will see she is quickly dismissed from the narrative for this behavior. The space dedicated to her punishment exceeds that dedicated to non-compliance. The king and his advisors put a definitive end to acts that go against himself and his regime and it serves as a warning for the rest of the population who should consider a similar type of disobedience. Compositionally, the blue color is used to differentiate the various scenes in this first panel and strikingly stands out to the viewer. It is employed in a structural column that divides the first and second scene, and is also the color of a throne-like structure that houses the king.

Showing absolute authority in the third scene, the king expulses Vashti from the empire when she does not comply with his demands.

In this scene, Vashti is led away by two male servants (Fig. 2.4). The Latin inscription tells how Vashti was “prohibited that she had any further claim to him (Panel 1).” We see the announcement put forth telling of Vasthi’s expulsion from the realm. As we can see from the first passage, Ahasueros was first and foremost interested in displaying his power in the empire. Whereas when she was queen she held a position in the superior portion of the tapestry, her final scene contrasts as it takes place in the lower quadrant of the panel. In this scene, Vashti’s hands are crossed upon her chest, showing a gesture of resignation and acceptance of her plight. This episode is reminiscent of how the Catholic Kings constructed their own power as central and their word as final. In the Edict of Expulsion, the Catholic Monarchs begin the proclamation of the expulsion of the Jews through the listing of their own power and position: “King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Seville, Sardinia, Cordoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaen, of the Algarve, Algeciras, Gibraltar, and of the Canary Island...”⁷ In fact the Catholic Monarchs received their name by Pope Alexander the VI for their defense of the Catholic faith (Kamen 37). We must remember that they expelled the Jewish elements of their society who did not conform to the religious mandates of conversion. Vashti, like the Iberian Jews, is led out of her home and into the unknown of the diaspora. There can be no mistake; disobedience is met with swift and decisive punishment. At the end of Chap. 3 in the *Comedia de Amán y Mardoqueo*, we are presented with a similar discussion of the two pillars of leadership and rule: reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience.

A pivotal element of this first panel is display and performance: the king must demonstrate the wealth, vastness, and power of his empire and show the bitter fate of those who do not comply. The performance within the images represented on the tapestries are important, but of equal importance is also the performance of the tapestry in its society. The tapestry served as a type of bible for the majority illiterate population as mentioned previously and the size of the figures in the panel are so large as to appear life size to the public who was and still is allowed

⁷Peters, Edward. “*Jewish History and Gentile Memory: The Expulsion of 1492*.” *Jewish History* 9 (1995): 9–34, at 23–28. Reprinted in: Constable, Olivia Ed. *Medieval Iberia*. Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania UP, 1997.

to approach the panels. The illusionism of the real space occupied by its figures allows a type of identification to be created between the audience and the art in which the viewer participates in the event. An object of supreme value and opulence, it could not have gone unnoticed, or unprivileged to even the most casual viewer.

This panel also upholds the performance of contemporary gender norms which place the female figures in more passive positions. Vashti is punished because she disobeys and does not comply with the norms and expectations for women as subservient figures. Thematically, some ideas resonate immediately with the other Esther texts that I analyze in this book, most notably the masculine population that dominates this panel. Masculine friendship between the king and Haman begins the narrative in *Amán y Mardoqueo* in Chap. 3 and is an element that is found in the original source biblical text. Similarly, Ahasueros is the only character male or female that appears in all three panels and in this way emerges as the central actor of the story. In this story, the king brings justice, orbited by the two queens. This panel's main role is to establish a tone of power and reflect the splendor of the Persian Empire. We can see through the opulence of the banquet and the royal environment how this tapestry was made to resonate with the Iberian Empire at the time of its creation. Now let us move on to the second panel, when order is restored and Ahasueros finds a new queen.

PANEL 2: EXALTACIÓN DE ESTER AL TRONO DE PERSIA (430 × 770 CM)

Exaltación de Ester al trono de Persia (Fig. 2.5) highlights the necessity of a compatible royal unit. This panel primarily serves to reestablish a balanced monarchy and demonstrate a king and queen that occupy the throne together. This idea is quite reminiscent of how Isabel and Ferdinand constructed their power together through the presumed nuptial motto that reflects balance between the two: “tanto monta, monta tanto.”⁸ Loosely translated, this phrase means “equal opposites in balance.”

⁸For a nuanced study of how the Iberian Royals constructed their unequal and balanced power see Barbara Weissberger's 2009 article “Tanto monta-The Catholic Monarchs' Nuptial Fiction and the Power of Isabel I of Castile.”

Once again, the blue color is used structurally within the panel in a triptych arrangement to divide the various scenes. A slightly deeper blue is also the primary color used to depict the roofs of the houses. This internal division is clear and achieved through great artistry. This panel presents Mordechai informing the king about a plot upon his life. Like the first panel, this scene is filled with masculine figures that populate the court. The king is seated on a tall throne-like seat, holding court and listening to the counsel of his many advisors in the top left (Fig. 2.6). Below this image, we witness the king knighting Mordechai in thanks. He appears before the king in a kneeling position waiting to accept his honor. Mordechai's distinct vestments make it obvious that he is a key player in these two scenes.

In the upper part of the main panel of the triptych, a general call is made to gather all the young women of the town; a *pregonero* or town crier that uses a bugle to announce the request made by the king.⁹ As this figure passes among the townspeople on a horse, the viewer sees maidens in the windows listening to the royal decree. Rich brocades in deep red colors decorate the windows and the horse upon which the *pregonero* sits and imparts a regal atmosphere among the Northern European cities of Tournai or Brussels.¹⁰ These tapestries reflect the northern European cities' architecture and style. Torra de Arana, Hombria Tortajada, and Domingo Pérez show that the luxuriousness of the tapestry reflects the typical elements of the Flemish men and women.

In addition to retelling the biblical story of Esther for an Iberian audience, these tapestries also offer an important portrait of early sixteenth-century Europe. In the central scene, Esther is presented at court among a group of other female candidates (Fig. 2.7). Esther stands in front of a group of other young maidens and along with her uncle Mordechai. Her head is slightly bowed and her hands are crossed at the waist. She maintains a typical expression of female subservience in this time period and in bowing her head to the king shows her submissive behavior

⁹For more information regarding the use of musical instruments in the collection of *La Seo*, see Carlos García Benito and Alejandro Martín López's comprehensive article "Instrumentos musicales en los tapices de La Seo del Salvador de Zaragoza."

¹⁰The use of tapestries and other woven pieces to decorate the exterior of homes is commonly found in Flemish tapestries such as in this panel. I have to thank the official tour guide at *La Seo*, Juan Antonio Montolio Palacín, who holds his masters in art history. Many of the key descriptions for my analysis came out of long conversations with him.

which contrasts with Vashti's earlier disobedience. She is crowned and is positioned below the king who is seated on the throne and surrounded by a group of men. The panel ends with Esther ascending the throne with Ahasueros. In the final scene, the king and Esther are presented seated next to each other and each slightly bow their head to the other (Fig. 2.8). The wedding feast is presented in the Latin inscription: "Ahasueros, wishing to unite himself with Esther, prepared a reception and determined that she would be queen in place of Vashti (Panel 2)." On either side of them, we see musicians playing flutes and other woodwinds in celebratory fashion. Below the queen and king are surrounded a group of servers and ladies in waiting.

Esther's gestures reveal a type of respect and obedience to the king. Whereas in the first scene we see Vashti show with her hands that she will not obey the king's command, Esther in the final image in this panel displays a gesture of open hands. These open hands show that she is ready to accept the food Ahasueros gives her in the reception that is held upon their union. By extension, in accepting the food, she is also accepting the courtly role of queen and the gendered comportment associated with it. Marking the role of stately banquets, the king is also presented before a sumptuous table in Fig. 2.1 as well.

This panel upholds female virtuosity as celebrated in the biblical story and in Iberian contemporary gender ideology. It presents the idea that a key requirement for a worthy queen is her beauty. This theme is found throughout the many retellings that I analyze in this monograph and complies with contemporary norms regarding desired female behavior in the early modern period. As we will see in the Lope text in Chap. 3, it is Esther's exceptional beauty that allows her to supersede traditional gendered bounds, i.e., approaching the king without being summoned in the third panel. This same idea functions in this panel, Esther is displayed as a remarkably beautiful figure that stands out above all the other maidens in the town. As we read in the Latin inscription: "Esther stood out to the king as the most beautiful among them (Panel 2)." Torra de Arana, Hombria Tortajada and Domingo Pérez show that each face is deeply individualized in this panel, creating individual roles as opposed to stock figures for each of the characters. In Esther's case, she is presented with long golden hair which is typical for Northern European women. In this second panel, she wears a crown and is unmistakably the female protagonist.

PANEL 3: ESTER SALVA A SU PUEBLO (395 × 800 CM)

The third panel *Ester salva a su pueblo* (Fig. 2.9) like the others is read from left to right; however, the visual field in this panel is also divided into top and bottom. This final panel includes the most detail and as we have seen it is divided into more scenes than the first two. This panel depicts Mordechai refusing to kneel in deference to Haman. In this scene, Haman is standing and other subjects bow to him, while Mordechai is located to the far right of the visual field in a seated position. His posture and arms do not reflect anger but clearly show that he will not show deference. This episode is also dominated by men and there are a group of male figures that observe the exchange in the background. The king bestows his ring upon Haman, reflecting the confidence he holds in his trusted advisor. Haman and the king are both standing at an equal level while other men in the foreground and background are represented in smaller size and some are seated.

The viewer witnesses how in this panel Mordechai informs Esther of the plan to kill the Jews, which is crucial for the advancement of the plot. Mordechai in this scene on the top left has his arms crossed and an unlabeled Esther listens attentively.¹¹ In the background, the viewer witnesses the town in which the story takes place. Like the other panels, it is incredibly visually rich and amidst the many details it is easy to lose the narrative. In order to anchor the viewer, this panel employs some key material markers and symbols that serve to punctuate important aspects of the story, namely, the king's ring, Mordechai's sackcloth, and Esther's final banquet. The ring represents the king's trust in Haman and signifies the hardship that the Jewish people are about to face. We read in the Latin inscriptions "When Haman confirmed that Mordechai despised him, he obtained the king's ring in order to condemn all the Jews (Panel 3)." The sackcloth reinforces the plight of the Jewish people if Haman's plan is successful and makes Esther spring into action. We once again read in the Latin inscriptions: "Upon hearing the Jews were condemned, Mordechai dressed in a sackcloth, and arrived at the royal palace to inform Esther

¹¹As Esther is not labeled and is not wearing a crown, another interpretation of this scene is that Mordechai discusses the plan with one of Esther's ladies in waiting.

(Panel 3).”¹² The sackcloth is used to show penitence and to represent the deep fear that Mordechai experiences regarding the fate of the Jewish people. It is found throughout all the biblical versions of the story, in this visual text it is striking because Mordechai in Fig. 2.5 appeared well-dressed at court and in Fig. 2.9 his vestments contrast in their simplicity.

In the next scene, Esther prepares herself to go before the king uninvited (Fig. 2.10). She readies herself surrounded by female company and is seated with her crown distinctly placed on her head. Although the tapestries do not present the fast that Esther undergoes in the biblical text before approaching the king, she is surrounded by an all-female company. This would have been the group that she fasted with in the source text. The fast is one of the aspects of this story that supports Esther as a devoted Jew and religious figure and so it is highlighted in other retellings especially in *Poema de la Reyna Ester* in chapter three and for the Carvajal sisters in Chap. 5. However, this aspect was left out in the tapestries because they were employed primarily to support a Catholic regime in post-expulsion Iberia. We next follow to Esther appearing before the king announced. In the central scene of the panel, she arrives at the king’s audience with a group of ladies in waiting: “Esther all dressed up appeared before the king and he was pleased to welcome her, and she humbly begged him to attend her feast with Haman (Panel 3).” Showing his power and her precarious position in arriving without being summoned, Esther is depicted below Ahasueros on his throne. The king opens his arms in a gesture of welcome. Whereas throughout the panels thus far Esther is presented as a passive figure who complies unquestioningly with norms for female behavior (subservience, compliance), in this final panel, Esther uses her queenly exceptionality to resist traditional gender norms.¹³

¹²The biblical account shows that Mordechai arrives in a sackcloth and in the written text as we see this idea is reproduced, however, in observing the tapestries Mordechai is dressed in rich clothing much like the other figures that populate the retelling. Upon a close comparison of his vestments in the two scenes, some of the more garish elements of finery are removed in the latter where Mordechai favors a more simple dress in color (beige) and style.

¹³This topic will be discussed in depth in the Lope de Vega’s *La Hermosa Esther* in Chap. 3. For further reading regarding queenly exceptionalism see Barbara Weissberger’s foundational text *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power*.

The penultimate scene depicts the banquet that Esther holds for the king and Haman (Fig. 2.11). The queen and king are both seated at equal stature with a standing Haman at their right. Wine is being served and women populate the foreground and male attendees populate the background. The final scene on the upper right shows Haman and his wife awaiting their demise.¹⁴ Paralleling the musician that called to expel Vashti in the first panel, this scene depicts a group of trumpet players that make the announcement that Haman will be exterminated. Finally, the banquet held by Esther creates a narrative and visual circularity with the first panel. *Banquete de Asuero y degradación de la reina Vasti* (1.1) presents a public banquet held by the king, which is the largest and principal image in the panel. In the third panel, *Ester salva a su pueblo* (3.1), the second to last image in the sequence presents Esther holding a private banquet for the king and Haman. This is the turning point of the narrative, when Esther is able to show the king that Haman is the enemy.

Haman faces his demise in the last sequence paralleling Vashti's banishment in the first panel. The message is clear; the king has ultimate authority and those who do not comply with his dictates or try to harm his loved ones will suffer the consequences. As in the second panel, in this final panel of the series order and balance is restored. Esther is retained as a heroine who saves the Jewish people precisely because she operates within gender norms of her day and within a power structure that locates the king on top of the hierarchy. One of the crucial elements of the Catholic Monarchy in the early modern period is the ideal that the king serves a divine prophecy and is ordained by God to rule. Peggy Liss shows that Isabel's reign was constructed within the divine order and the hierarchical order of "absolute royal power" as stipulated in the *Siete Partidas* (2004, p. 123, 346). Her Hieronymite confessor Hernando de Talavera wrote an inspirational tract in 1476 urging Isabel to seek moral perfection and binding her to royal virtue: "it is calling to aspire to perfection of your estate. If you are Queen, you ought to be a model and stimulus to your subjects in the service of God" (122). Isabel organized her own rule through a direct relationship that she had with God (the sovereign of heaven) and a vision of herself within this divine

¹⁴Some scholars argue that the series is not complete. Although the last panel suggests that Haman and his wife will be killed, it does not show the gallows and the burning of the bodies of Haman and his sons (these would have been the same gallows that Haman ordered to be constructed for the Jews).

order (123, 346). We will explore this idea further in the *comedia*, *Aman y Mardoqueo* in Chap. 3, but we can clearly see the power that the church and state shared in the period when these tapestries were first displayed in Zaragoza.

This series of tapestries also presents the various spaces that surround the royal center of the Persian or Catholic Monarchs. The townspeople and homes that they occupy feature in this scene that moves beyond the palace walls. The incorporation of non-royal or palace based space allows the common people to connect with this story and draw connections about their own role in their nation. *La Seo* is located in the center of Zaragoza and is a public meeting space alongside the other major *Cathedral de Pilar*—both are found in the central plaza in Zaragoza's downtown. These tapestries create a living narrative that connects the public 500 years ago with townspeople today. The aspects of everyday life that are presented allow the audience to see their own personal connections with the main biblical text. There is no monolithic viewer of these tapestries, they were viewed by men and women, clergy, elite, and common people alike. The idea of a dual ideal viewer fits within the nature of reformation Spain whose population was polarized into rich and poor. For the elite they were aspirational, and for the common people they became a type of spiritual advisor. The sumptuousness of the materials would have stood as an example for the elite and the courtly lifestyle as demonstrated through the display of wealth found within the images. The materiality themselves of the panel would have also stood out to the elite viewer as objects that were very valuable. For the commoner, there would have been a connection as mentioned earlier due to the almost life-size figures that populate the panels.

To date, only a handful of scholars have worked with these intricate visual retellings. However, these incredible tapestries definitely merit further consideration from art historians and scholars of the early modern period. De Arana, Hombria Tortajada, and Domingo Pérez show that this series of tapestries is one of the most important conserved set of Western European tapestries (118). This is true both in terms of the quality of original images and thanks to the excellent work that the restorers in the late twentieth-century undertook in the *Real Fábrica de Tapices* [the Royal Factory of Tapestries] located in Madrid. The fact they are displayed in the same building that they have been preserved over 500 years adds dramatically to their presentation and the living narrative that they share with all visitors.

The tapestries add a complexity to how we understand and appreciate the material culture that surrounded both sixteenth-century elite figures. They also help explain how the general populace could access stories that shaped their religious identity and national character and reveal the connections between the elite and common people. These tapestries also help situate Spain within a broader European context in which royal figures participated and married into the courts of other nations. The series *Esther and Ahasuerus* demonstrate how cooperation between these seemingly distinct national units, Spain and Flanders, occurred precisely through the artistic and creative domain. As we move to another genre that is defined by its performativity, the *autos sacramentales*,¹⁵ we see similar themes of nation building and identity expressed in these didactic plays aimed at sharing a centralizing message with the Spanish populace.

I analyze two *autos* in the second part of this chapter. Although preserved in written form, these *autos* in their time were meant to be performed in public spaces, many times accompanying the celebration of Corpus Christi. The genre of the moralizing one-act biblical play was particular to Iberia and reflects in almost all cases contemporary Iberian values. Many of the *autos* tell biblical stories. Written anonymously, the *autos* use the Esther story primarily to promote obedience to the regime of the Catholic Kings. The popular genre of the *auto sacramental* (allegorical plays on biblical subjects) resonated strongly with a contemporary Iberian public because in the post-expulsion environment of Iberia many of these one-act plays were publically performed in an environment of increased religious tension and reform. The central focus of these retellings was to shape the consciousness of a populace. These texts do not celebrate Esther; instead they focus on the wrongdoings of gender non-compliant women and punish those who do not respect the power of the king and his empire. As we will see, the *autos sacramentales* were used as a rhetorical tool for nation building and thereby justify the expulsion of heterodox members of society, namely Jews and Muslims.

Significantly these performances would have occurred in public spaces in which the local populace could easily access and engage. As these texts were performed in Castilian, the viewing public would not need to know the ecclesiastical church language of Latin, nor would they need to be

¹⁵The genre of the *auto sacramental* is particular to Spain and does not exist in any other language, for this reason I use the Castilian term throughout this study. The closest English translation would be one-act sacramental play.

literate. Sara M. Nalle shows that before 1510, 9% of males were literate in Cuenca and 0% of women were literate, and in Valencia 1/3 of males and 16% of females owned books and were presumed literate (74).¹⁶ Thus, visual and theatrical representations became a principal method of addressing a large number of people. These theatrical representations also helped serve to help create cohesion in the celebration and understanding of repeated tropes and narratives that built a nation based on principles of a strong empire and centralizing power.

QUEEN ESTHER IN TWO IBERIAN *AUTOS SACRAMENTALES*

The negotiation of identity in an emerging nation and its international empire is particularly acute in the two unpublished *autos sacramentales* that I analyze in this chapter: the *Auto del Rey Asuero quando desconfuso a Basti* (QDB) [Auto when King Ahasueros Undid Vashti] and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando aborco a Aman* (QAA) [Auto when King Ahasueros Hung Haman] published anonymously in 1501 in the *Códice de autos viejos* [Codex of Old Autos].¹⁷ I read these two texts together as they tell a complete version of the Book of Esther when combined. Whereas most scholars have focused on the *autos* composed by renowned Golden Age playwrights, Pedro Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega, the *Códice de autos viejos* help tell a story of how early modern society treated its religious others. Wardropper has divided the *autos sacramentales* into three groups; biblical, hagiographic, and allegorical, and QDB and QAA fit neatly into the first group. Although many of the *autos sacramentales* have been studied, these two particular texts have been largely ignored within the *Códice* (89). Reyes Peña has conducted the most in-depth study of the *Códice* where she has thoroughly analyzed the texts that deal with the Eucharist. However, as QDB or QAA do not fall into this category, they were left untouched.

The *autos sacramentales* reflect a changing social landscape. They became one of the important instruments that the powers that be—the government and the church—used to reach the people (Wardropper 89). In post-reformation, post-expulsion Iberia, the *auto sacramental* was most

¹⁶For more information about literacy and book ownership in early modern Spain, see Sara T. Nalle's "Literacy and Culture in Early Modern Castile."

¹⁷I will refer to *Auto del Rey Asuero quando desconfuso a Basti* as: QDB, and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando aborco a Aman* as: QAA.

obviously used to make otherwise inaccessible biblical stories and topics relatable to the illiterate majority. Like the tapestries that we explored in the first part of this chapter, these allegorical, one act plays have a broad appeal and a popular purpose. Performed in central public spaces and along with the procession of Corpus Christi, the *auto* is a theatrical experience that brings together many elements of society (90). Literary critics including Bruce W. Wardropper, Mercedes de los Reyes Peña and Bradley J. Nelson point out the centrality of popular reception of these one-act plays. These works employed entertainment and performance to communicate with the people. Wardropper shows that the genre of the *auto sacramental* is particular to Spain and developed precisely out of a society amidst the Counter-Reformation; for Reyes Peña this genre affirmed a particular Catholic discourse (43). The *autos sacramentales* resonated with a contemporary Iberian public, all too familiar with the environment of heightened tension and reform. Although Esther is traditionally the heroine of this apocryphal biblical story, as with the tapestries, we will see that her role is downplayed in the two *autos sacramentales*. In this way, the texts help create a Spanish society that carefully affirms a Catholic nationalist identity based on homogeneity and obedience.

The *autos* reflect contemporary social norms and values. Through a biblical framework they craft a new reality that celebrates obedience, the ideal of a strong empire and ruler, and the use of violence and punishment to maintain order. Here in these definitively Iberian texts, the values promoted in the tapestries of a strong homogenizing state are given a written script. In the beginning of QDB, Ahasuerus introduces himself by way of his extensive empire that runs “de la Yndia hasta Etiopia” (88v) [from India to Ethiopia] (*my translation*). His empire is composed of different conquered lands. An uncanny parallel can be drawn to the Iberian Empire at the moment of continued expansion in the New World. Similarly, the theme of obedience to a central figure is mandated by biblical Ahasuerus and has direct parallels to the contemporary reign of seventeenth-century Emperor: Carlos V. Chocano Mena shows that due to the Council of Trent, the *autos sacramentales* were celebrated in the New World especially during the celebration of Corpus Christi. In 1537 the pope composed a Papal Bull that made it mandatory for indigenous populations to celebrate different Christian holidays (152). Like their Iberian counterparts, these celebrations took place in the streets, with floats parading throughout the cities accompanied by theatrical representations. We read the description of the empire in QDB:

Los medos por mi obediencia
 vienen ante mi presencia
 los persas y los fenicios
 en mi servicio propicios
 estan con gran reverencia. (QDB: 87r)

The Medes out of obedience
 they come before me
 the Persians and the Phoenicians
 with great reverence
 are favorable in my service. (*my translation*)¹⁸

Ahasuerus constructs his empire in terms of the subjects that obey him. One can easily substitute “los judíos y los moros” [Jews and Muslims] or “los mexicanos y los indios” [Mexicans and Indians] for “los persas y los fenicios” [Persians and Phoenicians].¹⁹ This *auto* links the *Reconquista* in Iberia with the conquest of the New World, making an argument for a strong empire with obedient subjects. Chocano Mena shows that many *autos sacramentales* and other works of theater were used in the New World to garner compliance: “las representaciones pertenecientes a la tradición de ‘moros’ y ‘cristianos’ eran muestra de un ‘teatro de humillación’ por el cual los indios aceptaban su derrota” (151) [the representations depicting a ‘Moorish’ and ‘Christian’ tradition were proof of a ‘theater of humiliation’ by which the Indians were made to acknowledge their defeat] (*my translation*). Texts such as these *autos* were performed so that these new subjects would accept Spanish rule as absolute. They were crucial discursive tools for empire building. As we can see from the titles, *Auto del Rey Asuero quando desconfuso a Basti* [Auto when

¹⁸These *autos sacramentales* are not published and the original manuscripts are located in the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (National Library of Spain) in Madrid, Spain. Since the full text has not been translated, all the translations of them are my own.

¹⁹Cortés in his *Relaciones* refers to the indigenous people in Mexico as “mexicas” [Mexicans] and Columbus in his letters refers to the indigenous peoples as “indios” [Indians].

King Ahasueros Undid Vashti] and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando ahorco a Aman* [Auto when King Ahasueros Hung Haman], the two works emphasize the punishment dispersed to a disobedient citizen. Both of those requiring punishment are high-ranking individuals, Vashti as queen, and Haman as the king's top advisor.²⁰ In other words, nobody is above the reach of the king and his leadership. The king is linked rhetorically to God, and this rhetoric of Iberian Christendom and its earthly ruler was reproduced and taught in the New World by Catholic missionaries.

Although in the biblical book of Esther there is not one single reference to God, in the *autos*, God appears repeatedly throughout the two texts. In the following passage, Esther herself acknowledges the centrality of God:

Dios bivo glorificado
e de ynfalible poder
solo tu rrevereçiado
loor y gloria a de ser
supremo Dios a ti lado. (QAA: 95v)

God lives glorified
and of infallible power
only you are revered
praise and glory must be
supreme with God at your side.

This is an example of a strategic “emplotment,” or how the text is manipulated to promote values that its authors deemed relevant. Religion and state were constantly linked in the sixteenth-century Iberian Empire, justifying conquest through spiritual expansion. Espousing rhetoric which linked the Catholic Church and Catholic Monarchs, we see in these *autos* how the king takes on qualities of

²⁰Basti is originally referred to as Vashti or Zeret in the Hebrew compositions of this story. I will refer to the figures in the Esther story by their English names; Esther (Ester), Vashti (Basti), Ahasueros (Asuero), Haman (Amán), Mordechai (Mardoqueo).

absolute authority and rule. King Ahasuerus is compared to God in the following passage in QAA: “rrey Dios te muestre su faz” (95r) [God the king will show you what to do]. This idea takes on new meaning in the context of the colonies as the texts were used to garner obedience and loyalty among indigenous populations. Cristobal Colón in his 1493 *Carta a Santángel* [Letter to Santángel] relates the encounter with an indigenous population, and sets the stage of a New World that was ready to be evangelized. As we know in the foundational colonial texts such as the letters of Hernán Cortés (1519–1526), Cortés constructs the king as the equivalent of the spiritual sun-God for the Aztec civilization. Similarly, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega in the *Comentarios reales* (1609, 1617) [Royal Comentarios] upholds the Christian ruler as the fulfillment of a messianic prophecy. Furthermore, Iberian born Menassah Ben Israel in *La Esperanza de Israel* (1650) [The Hope of Israel] tells a Judeo-Christian messianic narrative in the encounter of Portuguese born Antonio de Montezinos with one of the lost tribes of Israel in colonial New Granada.

Another aspect of the text that reinforces the idea of power and obedience to a central authority is the tribunal of justice that punishes Vashti. This reference reminds a reader or spectator of the concurrent Inquisitorial trials or “tribunal de justicia” that were ongoing throughout Iberia and its empire, punishing those who did not adhere to religious and social codes. We read in QAA: “la qual no quiso venir/ni obedesçer mi mandado/que deve ser castigado/con justiçia tribunal” (89r) [the one that did not come/nor did she obey my command/should be punished/by a tribunal of justice]. Like the reference to the Inquisition whose job was to shape an emerging nation, we see through the treatment of Vashti a clear project that works to build this nation and wider empire:

No solamente Basti
te daño señor a ti
pero a todos los ausentes
ella representa el pueblo
y en tu serviçio presentes
dañara si pasa así. (QDB: 87r)

Not only does Vashti
 do harm to you Lord
 but to all those who are absent
 she represents the people
 and those who are present in your service
 would be hurt if it comes to this.

Vashti is simultaneously privileged and punished. Early on in the retelling, she falls from her position of queen when she does not obey the king's request. As a woman, she is privileged by representing her people, but as a model must be publically shamed for her misdeeds in QDB: "las mugeres osadia/ternan desta rrebeldia" (90r) [the audacity of women/she will become rebellious]. Her punishment is a cure for the body of society through the removal of a cancerous, heterodox element. Vashti and in extension any disobedient citizen would hurt the Spanish nation if allowed to remain within its boundaries. Curiously where Vashti is expelled and forced to resettle elsewhere, Esther, becomes the new queen.

Expulsion is presented as an avoidable punishment resulting from result of specific actions, i.e., disobedience by an individual subject. Like the Jews who faced expulsion because of their heterodox religious practices, these could be corrected and fixed. In other words, they could convert. This is a complex warning; a sympathetic reader could read Vashti's exile as a great sadness and connect it to the plight of the Jews exiled from Spain, while the targeted audience could accept this as what happens when obedience is not met within their current society. The king "expels" Vashti in the following passage:

Vete ya de mi presençia
 que me tienes enfadado
 con tu rrazonar cansado
 y cumpliendo la sentençia
 sal luego de mi rreynado....
 el rey a mandado
 que seas del rreyno espelida

como muger omicida
 pues que al rreal mandado
 fuiste desobedecida. (90v)

Leave my presence now
 you have made me angry
 with your tired reasoning
 and obeying my sentence
 leave my kingdom already...
 the king has commanded
 that you will be expelled from the realm
 like a murderess
 because you disobeyed the royal decree.

Vashti is banished and expelled from the empire for her disobedience. Her fate in this text was used to serve as a warning to those in Iberia who were not following religious homogeneity and to justify recent treatment of Iberian religious others. The king's banishment of Vashti connects directly with the Spanish Edict of Expulsion (1492). We read in the Edict: "se acordó en dictar que todos los Judíos y Judías deben abandonar nuestros reinados y que no sea permitido nunca regresar...para algunos de los mencionados judíos encontrándolos muy culpables por lo por los susodichos crímenes y transgresiones contra la santa fe católica han sido un remedio completo obviar y corregir estos delitos y ofensas" (Suárez Fernández 392). [It was agreed that all Jews and Jewesses should abandon our kingdoms and would never be permitted to return...for some of the aforementioned Jews were found very guilty of crimes and transgressions against the Holy Catholic faith and this will be a remedy to completely obviate and correct these crimes and offenses] (*my translation*). Vashti is expelled because she did not conform to the rules of the kingdom in a way that was significant and meaningful to the empire under construction in Persia. Similarly, the Jews are expelled from Spain because their religious actions undermine the principles of a new state based on the Catholic faith. These principles include obedience to a ruler

who wields ultimate authority and expects subjects to conform absolutely to royal decrees. Expulsion in the *autos* is constructed as the only way to correct an offence that is capable of undoing the very fiber of the Persian and Spanish society.

Vashti, or any judaizing member of early modern Spain, must be punished and subsequently participate in a collective moment of shaming. Although Vashti is not disobedient in religious terms, she is politically disobedient in the biblical text. The political parallel between Vashti and the Jewish population in early modern Iberia is striking. As the Iberian monarchy combined the rule of state and religion, the Jewish population's disobedience manifested in not conforming to the state-mandated religious norm of Catholicism. Let us see how Vashti is punished in the text. In the following passage Vashti is described as worthy of death, hated, and alone:

Mas donde pueda morir
 muger tan desventurada
 Ya se va la desdichada
 muger mal afortunada
 triste sola aborregida
 angustiada y afligida
 de todos desamparada. (QDB: 90v)

But where can she die
 ill-fated woman
 The wretched one has already gone
 woman so unfortunate
 sad, alone and hated
 anguished and afflicted
 she stands helpless from all.

Although this sounds a lot like the expulsion tale of someone who feels wronged, i.e., the plight of the Jewish and *Morisco* (converted Muslims)

population in early modern Spain, this monologue functions as a rhetorical strategy to connect all peoples of Iberia and create a collective culture of compliance.²¹ Although officially all Jews and Muslims would have disappeared from the peninsula, their familial practices and legacies did not. As these aspects could not be completely erased, there was a need to shame those with impure backgrounds and make sure that aspects of identity that complied with the official policies of state were highlighted. This text with moralizing objectives makes a clear message of what can happen if one does not follow the mandates of the powerful ruler.

Vashti describes her pain: “Acaben mi triste vida/las lagrimas de amargura/para que la muerte dura/de mi dolor comivida” (91v) [Let these bitter tears/end my sad life/so that death lingers/the pain of my life]. She then is asked to remove all signs that she was queen. We read in the *auto*: “desmuda os ese vestido” (91r) [remove that dress]. Clothing becomes a symbol of both power and obedience and denotes belonging in this text. It also reflects the condition of those in exile, who had to leave without possessions, and also echoes the broader condition of the remaining Iberian population that were stripped of their past identities. They could no longer use any ritual memorabilia that identified a Jewish or *Morisco* past.

In other retellings of the Esther story, we see a veneration of the figure of Esther, such as in Lope de Vega’s *La Hermosa Ester* or in Pinto Delgado’s *La Reyna Ester*. For crypto-Jews in the New World, Esther is heroic and relatable because she lives in a context of persecution and secrecy. She only reveals her true, Jewish identity, in order to save her people. In these *autos*, the punishment of Vashti is primary and Esther plays a secondary role. The fact that Esther is actually an orphan is deliberately not reflected in the second *auto*. The Jewish figure that is presented as being actively involved in the plight of the Jewish people is a male figure; Esther’s uncle Mordechai. Unlike *La Hermosa Ester* and *La Reyna Ester*, the *autos* do not celebrate the Jewish people or denounce the attempted massacre of this minority group, but instead speak against one who does not respect the authority of the ruler. The Jewish heroine is downplayed to make room for a tale of punishment and misbehavior. We see this clearly in the punishment that Vashti receives. The text presents a clear warning about what will happen in the case of disobedience—expulsion and orphanhood. Vashti describes her painful exile

²¹ The *Morisco* population of Spain was expelled in 1501.

metaphorically, as “herfana afligida” (QDB: 91r) [afflicted orphan]; she is an orphan without a land or a family. Vashti’s experience parallels the experience of the religious others that were relocated out of Iberia, or remained after conversion without their families. The politics of expulsion separated and divided families both within Iberia and in the diaspora. The author creates a scenario that focuses on the pain that is caused by expulsion instead of sympathizing with Vashti.

There is a tension in the fact that the author chose a story that typically celebrates a Jewish heroine to create a narrative of national identity based on compliance and instruct a populace on their expected behavior. This tension is exactly why the authors of the *autos sacramentales* would construct this story. We must remember that in this nation’s recent history, the Jews were expelled and when this retelling was composed there was a robust Inquisition in place that systematically worked to rid the society of judaizers. A narrative that initially celebrated the Jewish people is now being told in their absence to a nascent nation. Seidman’s elaboration helps us think through this tension. She writes: “In the case of translations that cross-religious boundaries, where translators render texts of another religion or where one ‘faith community’ adopts a translation composed by translators affiliated with a rival group, the stakes multiply” (38). We encounter a text that has undergone translation after translation, from its biblical roots, to the many versions through different styles in the following centuries.²² Although the Esther story is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, here we can read the Christian component as the rival faith group whereby its retelling makes the tenuous existence of Iberian others visible. Instead of centering on Esther as a heroine, in this “emplotment” of the Book of Esther, the text reframes on obedience. It focuses on punishing wrongdoers and a need for absolute obedience to authority. This text highlights conformity through absence.

²²Medieval Iberian scholars wrote critical editions of this story including: Abraham Ibn Ezra, Abraham Saba, and Zechariah ben Joshua ben Saruk. Both Saba and Saruk experienced expulsion first-hand and their analyses of the text reflect their personal hardship. In the early modern period retellings of the story were numerous as shown in this book.

Whereas the genre of the *auto sacramental* played an important role in early modern Iberian society, it quickly went out of fashion and lost acclaim. Maybe the elaborate performances required representing the text lost touch with the public, or maybe this social tool of control was no longer useful to a society that stamped out dissenters. The structure is repetitive and not particularly innovative, but these *autos* today tell pointed narratives about sixteenth-century Iberia. The Catholic Kings and their regime in early sixteenth-century Spain were particularly focused on crafting domestic and international policies that negotiated and defined their nation's identity. This was the time of transatlantic expansion into the New World, which had reverberations and repercussions on both sides of the Atlantic as each geographic body shaped the development of the other.²³ The *auto sacramental* became a tool of the Iberian Empire and newly formed nation seeking to define itself through religious homogeneity.

Bradley J. Nelson discusses the complex modernity found in the nascent *autos sacramentales* and presents them as elements of the "fragmented world of the baroque" (81). These texts were created at the border and by the border (81). These borders constantly shifted, as we move in these texts between Iberia and Northern Europe, between the medieval and the modern, between emerging nation-states, these texts were composed by figures whose lives were quite literally in flux. The Esther texts dialogue with the historical context in which they emerged and her treatment in the two sets of texts is strikingly different. In the first set of texts that we analyzed, Esther's role is secondary. She is not hailed as a heroine but is construed as a passive figure that fits within early modern gender norms. Cautious before the authority of her husband the king, she fits neatly into seventeenth-century society's configuration. Her role as a Jewish person is also downplayed; instead her conformity as a member of dominant society is upheld.

In this chapter, we have compared two types of performance that shaped the formation of the Spanish nation. These works helped stimulate the development of a national rhetoric based on politics of homogeneity and exclusion. In the visual set of tapestries, the public

²³S. M Francis de Sales McGarry shows that Spanish missionaries brought the genre of the *autos sacramentales* to the New World (10).

witnessed a celebration of a strong empire and a king that stood at the center of his nation and people. In the theatrical *auto sacramentales*, we are invited to imagine the performances in the streets and plazas of early modern Spain. In these public spaces, many walks of life came together and would experience first-hand the values produced by a nation in the process of defining itself through obedience and punishment. Although the Catholic Kings attempted to create a nation state in isolation from its own diverse past, it was connected as we have seen to other nations in Northern Europe and across the seas to the New World. We will see that despite the best efforts of some dominant politicians, royalty, and authors, Spain's cultural products and peoples reached beyond Iberian borders. This is especially true among the *converso* population as we will see in the subsequent chapters when we explore the texts produced in the Sephardic Diaspora. Spain could not and did not erase its diverse past; in fact some of its subjects became part of unique global networks that persist until today.

APPENDIX

- 1.1 Assueros rex grande fecit convivium cunctis principibus suis ut ostenderet divicias glorie regni sui Hester 1^o./El Rey Asuero ofreció un gran banquete a todos sus generales para hacer alarde de las riquezas y esplendor de su reino./The King Ahasueros offered a large banquet for all of his generals to show the richness and splendor of his reign.²⁴

Cum Assueros mero incaluit septem eunuchos qui in conspectus eius ministrabant ad Vasti reginam dirigit eam um introducant./Cuando Asuero se puso alegre por el vino envió a la reina los siete enucos que servían en su presencia, para que la hicieran entrar./When Ahasueros got drunk on wine he sent the seven eunuchs that served the queen to bring her before him.

Ad regis imperium Vasti per eunuchos vocata venire contempsit hinc regis furorem pariterque nobilium erga se commovit./Vasti, convocada por los enucos de acuerdo con el mandato regio, rehusó acudir; por lo que concitó contra sí la ira del rey y de los nobles./Vashti called by the eunuchs according to the general

²⁴The Latin and Castilian translation are provided in the text *Los tapices de la Seo de Zaragoza* [The *La Seo* Tapestries of Zaragoza], the English translations are my own.

rule, denied attending and went up against the wrath of the king and his nobles.

Consilio principum et nobelium Assueros Vasti reginam abiecit et ne ultra ad eum ingrederetur simpliciter ipse inhibuit./Por consejo de los generales y de los nobles Asuero repudió a la reina Vasti y prohibió sin más que tuviese ulteriormente acceso a él./Following the advice of his generals and nobles, Ahasueros repudiated Queen Vashti and prohibited that she had any further claim to him.

- 2.1 Eunuchi regis Assueri in mortem eius conspiraverunt quod per Mardocheum ei innotuit hinc morte mala perierunt./Los eunucos del rey Asuero conspiraban para matarlo; lo cual supo éste por medio de Mardoqueo; y así aquéllos perecieron con ignominiosa muerte./Ahasuero's eunuchs conspired to kill him, he found out thanks to Mordechai and therefore the eunuchs received an ignominious death.

Jessu regis ad universas provincias diriguntur nuntii ad colligendum mulierculas una ut adoptetur loco Vasti./Por mandato del rey se envían mensajeros a todas las provincias para reunir muchachas, entre las cuales una sería elegida en lugar de Vasti./Upon the mandate of the king, messengers were sent to all the provinces to bring together young women, among them one that would be chosen in Vashti's place.

Cum Assuerus in Susan puellas virgines que adducere statuit, Hester formosior super omnes ei placuit./Cuando Asuero determinó que las doncellas y las muchachas fueran llevadas a Susa, Esther le agradó como la más hermosa entre todas./When Ahasueros decided that the young women and girls would be brought to Shushan, Esther stood out to the king as the most beautiful among them.

Assuerus Hester decenter volens copulari concilium parat et ut regnet viut loco Vasti./Asuero, deseando unirse convenientemente con Ester, prepara una recepción y determina que sea reina en lugar de Vasti./Ahasueros, wishing to unite himself with Esther, prepared a reception and determined that she would be queen in place of Vashti.

- 3.1 Cum Aman experimento probasset quod Mardocheus eum contemneret ad delacionem iudeorum anulum regis ipse obtinuit./Cuando Amán comprobó que Mardoqueo lo despreciaba, obtuvo

el anillo del rey para condenar a los judíos./When Haman confirmed that Mordechai despised him, he obtained the king's ring in order to condemn all the Jews.

Mardocheus iudeorum condemnacionem audiens indutus sacco ipsam deplorat ac regis ad palatium gradiens eam Hester taliter insinuat./Al oír Mardoqueo la condena de los judíos, la lamenta vestido del saco, y llegando al palacio real informa de ella a Ester./Upon hearing the Jews were condemned, Mordechai dressed in a sackcloth, and arrived at the royal palace to inform Esther.

Hester ornata regem adiit qui eam benivole recepit et ipsa eum cum Amán eius ad convivium humiliter declinare petit./Ester engalanada se presenta ante el rey que la acoge complacido, y le suplica humildemente que acude al convite junto con Amán./Esther all dressed up appeared before the king and he was pleased to welcome her, and she humbly begged him to attend her feast with Haman.

Aman refert qualiter ab Hester cum rege solus est invitatus plurimum que tamen se dolere quod a Mardocheo sit aspernatus./Amán refiere cómo ha sido invitado por Ester él solo con el rey y cuanto lamenta haber sido despreciado por Mardoqueo./Haman commented that he had been invited by Esther, alone with the king and he lamented how despised he had been by Mordechai.

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