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Holy Wednesday: A Nahuatl Drama from Early Colonial Mexico. By Louise Burkhart. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. xii + 314 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendix, biography, index. \$42.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

In this remarkable monograph, Louise Burkhart explores the text of the first known play in a native American language, "Holy Wednesday." Written in Nahuatl, it was undoubtedly the work of a Christianized Indian who had received instruction from the Franciscan friars responsible for evangelizing the Valley of Mexico in the early Spanish period. Burkhart makes the point, entirely correctly, that such a person would have a reasonable knowledge of Spanish and of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, he was a person trusted by the friars to produce a translation of a Christian text which would be performed for the continuing evangelization of the Nahuatl public during Holy Week. Still, within his text, Burkhart finds a challenge to the Christianizing mission of the Spanish as he subtly alters, augments, and edits the text.

Burkhart identifies the source of the play as a Spanish drama, *Lucero de Nuestra Salvación*, produced probably in the early 1580s, with the Nahuatl play following less than a decade later. The author of the Spanish play, a Valencian bookseller named Ausías Izquierdo Zebrero, was devoted to the Virgin Mary and depicts the farewell scene between Christ and his mother before his arrest and crucifixion. Mary is shown suffering with her son as he contemplates his future torment and execution. In a careful and extensive commentary, Burkhart compares the two plays, showing the ways in which the Nahuatl drama provides a masked re-rendering and response to the Spanish version. Placing her analysis soundly within the context of the times, she shows that the native text is an indication of "a refusal to practice Christianity quite in the European mode..." and that it implies "there is something unsatisfactory, even inferior, about the European version" (p. 5).

While Burkhart explores many aspects of the possible differences between the two texts, of particular interest to this reviewer is her careful discussion of what they show about the relationship between Christ and Mary. A fascinating gloss examines an addendum of four stanzas which appear in the Nahuatl but not in the Spanish. In a new ending to the play, possibly based on another Nahuatl source which remains unknown, the tenderness between Mother and Son and the terrible intensity of their leave-taking are emphasized. Far more than anywhere in the Spanish play, Christ and his Mother are seen as mutually involved as equals in the farewell. Mary's suffering as a human mother is emphasized by her use of the term *notelpotzin*, which means "my son" or even "my boy" (p. 250). She then proceeds to address Christ in metaphors frequently used in Nahuatl discourses addressed to children, metaphors emphasizing preciousness: "Ah, my child, my son, my life, my

existence, my jewel, my quetzal plume" (p. 161). In her speech, she emphasizes that she suffers even more than other biblical figures such as Jacob grieving for Joseph, holding his bloody coat (he did not suffer as she for he was not agonized by foreknowledge of his son's death); David lamenting for Absalom (he did not see him dead, pierced by lances); and Hagar, who could look away from her son Ishmael when she supposed he would die of thirst.

Even more striking is the harmonious ending to the drama, in which Christ exalts Mary rather than rejecting her embrace, as in the Spanish version. This action also contrasts with the biblical text Luke II:27, in which Christ brushes off the salutation of a woman listening to him preach, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." Christ in the biblical version replies, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it" (p. 253). In the Nahuatl play, Christ's closing statement exalts and blesses his mother, both her body which bore and nurtured him and her intelligence and character and moral stature. The last two lines read, "May your soul be praised, which is filled with grace and truth." The stage directions, marking the contrast with Izquierdo's ending in which Christ denies his mother a last embrace, emphasize their mutual support and love: "And they encouraged each other, then they took leave of each other, they said goodbye to each other, they embraced each other" (p. 163).

Burkhart makes the point that the Holy Wednesday text, despite its production based on a Spanish source and written under Franciscan direction, contains traces of themes that continue to be significant for indigenous peoples in Latin America today. This reviewer would suggest that one of these themes is the extraordinary reverence for, and even identification with, Mary as a suffering human mother.

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