



ESTHER IN
EARLY MODERN
IBERIA AND
THE SEPHARDIC
DIASPORA

*Queen of the
Conversas*

EMILY COLBERT CAIRNS



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Queen of the Conversas

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-57866-8 ISBN 978-3-319-57867-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-57867-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017939562

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Cover illustration: From the series ‘Ester y Asueros,’ held in the collection in the Museo de la Seo, Spain

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*For my lights—Alastair James and Wren Arthur Cairns, and to our
grandfathers—William “Woovie” Colbert and Arthur “Mick” Duncan*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a little girl, one of the first costumes that I remember wearing for Purim was that of Queen Esther. I still today feel connected to this Jewish Queen and heroine. This book project is the result of my long-standing fascination with her.

This project began when I was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Irvine. With gratitude, I acknowledge my professors and fellow students there especially my co-dissertation advisor Jacobo Sefamí, and Rachel O'Toole, and Ivette Hernández Torres. A very big thank you to my dissertation advisor Michelle M. Hamilton who continues to work with me, generously reading draft proposals and chapters and suggesting ideas for future work. I had one of my most enriching research experiences at the *Museo de la Seo* in Zaragoza, Spain in the summer of 2016. I thank them for the unlimited access I had to the tapestries that I speak about in Chap. 2. Thank you to director Ignacio-Sebastián Ruiz Hernández for providing me with access to this incredible space. A special thanks to the very knowledgeable guide who served as my personal guide and teacher Juan Antonio Montolío Palacín. I would also like to acknowledge a research fellowship in 2011 that I received from the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, CA allowing me to prepare Chap. 5 of this manuscript. Thank you to Salve Regina University, the Presidential Faculty Award for a course release, and the Provost Fund for two summer research stipends to support this project, one in the summer of 2013 to the *Biblioteca Nacional* in Madrid and one in 2016 to the *Museo de la Seo* in Zaragoza.

I thank my colleagues and students at Salve Regina University for our collaborative work over the past few years and their enthusiasm for my project. Thank you especially to the wonderful staff at McKillop library who have on two occasions allowed me to present research for this book for the campus community. A heartfelt thanks to the generous colleagues in my field who have offered support and encouraged the development of this project, offering ideas, suggestions and invaluable dialogue at conferences. A very large thank you to Greg Kaplan who has provided invaluable feedback throughout this entire manuscript and support throughout the project. I relied heavily on his knowledge and support. I would also like to thank Anthony Mangieri for detailed feedback on writing about tapestries and within the realm of art history in Chap. 2. Thank you to Ronnie Perelis for reading a draft of Chap. 4 on the Sephardic Diaspora and for continued conversations on the Inquisition and the New World in the early modern period. A big thank you to Esther Alarcón Arana for being a second pair of eyes on all the original translations from the Spanish to English throughout the entire manuscript. Any errors that remain are my own.

I would like to acknowledge *Chasqui* and *Hispanófila* for allowing me to utilize some of the ideas in the articles I published with them. Chasqui allowed the reproduction of sections in Chaps. 3 and 5 of the article “Esther among crypto-Jews and among Christians: Queen Esther and the Inquisition manuscripts of Isabel de Carvajal and Lope de Vega’s La hermosa Ester.” Sections of Chaps. 2 and 5 are reprint versions of an article published in *Hispanófila* “Esther in Inquisitorial Iberia and the Sephardic Diaspora.” (June 2016) 175. *Hispanófila*. 183–200. *Hispanófila* is available online at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/620296>. Finally, I must acknowledge the *Patrimonio Artístico de las Catedrales de Zaragoza*, Spain under the direction of the Director Ignacio-Sebastián Ruiz Hernández for the ability to reproduce original photographs from the series “Ester y Asueros” held in the collection in the *Museo de la Seo*.

I have a lot of gratitude to my wonderful family and friends for their continued support and belief in my work and who have always encouraged me to follow my passions. To Jennie and Jim Colbert, Pat and Les Cairns, Carley and Mike Howay, Sam Colbert, Gerti Colbert, Honey and Stew Karp, I love you all very much. The biggest thank you of all goes to my husband Alastair Cairns who has read, edited, and re-read every word in this book and whose love supports and guides me every day. Thank you.

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Introduction

Esther is the patron-saint for crypto-Jews and *conversos* in the early modern period. A biblical secret Jewish queen who lived as a minority person in Persia, she only reveals her identity in order to save her coreligionists at great personal risk. She is a hybrid figure that performs one identity publically while keeping another privately. Esther's hybridity makes her a compelling and a relatable figure in a changing Iberian and broader European landscape. While the Spanish Empire and emerging Spanish nation sought to define itself based on religious homogeneity and exclusion, the numerous Esther retellings undermine official rhetoric. Written both within Iberia and outside in the greater Sephardic Diaspora, these texts make Esther a subversive early modern globetrotter as her story was told and retold among the communities of *conversos* escaping inquisitorial persecution and seeking freedom in unknown lands.

The book of Esther tells the story of a woman who became queen in biblical Persia. King Ahasueros banished his first wife for not obeying his wishes and called upon all the young maidens (virgins) in the land to come to court and vie to be queen. Upon the urging of her Uncle Mordechai, Jewish Esther spent months with a harem of other young maidens readying themselves to be presented before the king, and was later selected as queen for her exceptional beauty. Crucially for the *converso* population, she did not reveal her religious identity until a plan to exterminate the Jews was made known to Mordechai. Esther revealed her Jewish identity to the king and asked that he save her people.

She emerged victorious and in her people's place, Haman and his family were killed.

I explore eight Castilian texts produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Sephardic Diaspora that recuperate the story of Queen Esther. Whereas Barry Dov Walfish shows how the medieval context affects the interpretation of the Book of Esther for its Jewish commentators, a similar study has not been achieved for the many retellings composed in the early modern Sephardic Diaspora. My book project is the first comparative study of the Esther texts in this period in Castilian. I analyze texts that were composed within post-expulsion Iberia and texts written in the Sephardic Diaspora. The way that these two groups recuperate this story reveals a vastly disparate worldview and values. In studying these texts together, common trends begin to emerge. The retellings composed in Iberia emphasize how particular values of state are upheld, including obedience, a strong regime, and a strict gender division. In the retellings composed in the diaspora and outside of the Iberian borders, Esther herself emerges as a heroine.

Although all of these retellings uphold the form and style of the Spanish Golden Age, they have largely been left unstudied by scholars of the Golden Age. My project contributes to the field of Sephardic Studies and early modern Iberian studies by expanding upon our understanding of this largely marginalized set of texts. The representation of Esther held importance to Spanish culture and empire as well as to Portugal, to a lesser degree given their colonial expansion in the East. Spanish and Portuguese were the world languages of the time. The set of texts that I work with are both fictional and historical. Composed in geographically distinct locations, they explore the boundaries of the Sephardic Diaspora. They are a diverse corpus of texts recounted through a varied set of genres both visual and written; tapestries, the religious *auto-sacramental*, theater, and poetry. The written texts represent the widespread literary contributions of the Sephardic Diaspora and also show the singular role that the Castilian language had in connecting this widespread community. These texts also reveal the impact that Golden Age Castilian literary tradition had in shaping styles and poetic compositions, with a global reach comparable to popular movies or television series. Along with the literary genres, I analyze the historical inquisition archives from Nueva España (today Mexico): the unpublished Inquisition manuscripts of Isabel de Carvajal and her sister Leonor de Carvajal. While I am focusing on the texts written in Castilian, these Esther texts did not emerge in an

isolated linguistic context; there are many other Early Modern texts written about Queen Esther, most notably Racine's French language *Esther*.

I analyze these texts through a post-structural and post-colonial lens especially focusing on theories of gender identity and how the body becomes a site for power struggles. I also analyze how gender identity is negotiated and defined in the private and public realms and argue for a *Sephardic difference* located in the female figure. It is through both Esther's body and person that ideals of nationhood, empire, and self-fashioning were projected, inscribed, and reinscribed. Authors used her body to contest national identity and draw territorial lines. María Elena Martínez shows that the female body was the "symbolic territory in which communal boundaries were drawn" (55). As a crypto-Jewish female, Esther became a palimpsest due to her shifting religious identity and a queenly status that transcended traditional restrictions imposed on the female body. She was upheld as a central figure throughout the early modern diaspora precisely because of the mutability of her identity. Like the Jews and crypto-Jews in the Sephardic Diaspora, Esther's identity changed, yet she emerged victorious in affirming two essential characteristics of her identity; her femaleness and her religious identity.

These stories help us understand a nascent type of national identity that is not grounded in a specific geographical location, but is created across physical and national boundaries. These texts all tell a different story of diaspora that compares with many of the modern day journeys of political exiles, religious and economic refugees. Borrowing the language from cultural geographers, the Sephardic Diaspora exists within a cultural landscape that is based upon social and cultural relationships. These relationships share common linguistic, religious, and cultural practices that are established through the widespread members of their diaspora. This community very much exists within the imagination of its participants as stipulated by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. A unique characteristic of the Sephardic Jewish identity is the overlapping notions of homeland: Israel remains the biblical homeland of all Jews, while Spain is the real and recent homeland.¹

¹For the Portuguese Community in Amsterdam called the *nação portuguesa* [Portuguese Nation], Portugal is also referred to as a third layer in the web of homelands. Upon the politics of freedom of movement between the two countries in the Iberian Peninsula in the 1580s, many families sought economic opportunities and moved between the two countries. Many Jews of Portuguese origin have Spanish descent as well.

These subjects and the texts that I am studying are not Jewish or Catholic, and cannot be studied as one or the other. They are hybrid creations, with competing notions of identity in play.² They are multifaceted and plural and to varying degrees take on more Jewish or Catholic characteristics, but they are new and unique. Although many have been composed within the literary trends of the Spanish Golden Age, since they were written outside of Iberian borders, these texts have been largely overlooked and thus far have been of primary interest to Jewish scholars.

The Sephardic Diaspora began in 1391, although its character changed dramatically upon the Spanish policy of expulsion for all Jews in 1492. The year 1391 marks the date of the first baptisms of Jews in Spain, and the creation of new religious identity whereby Jews, the recently converted or *conversos*,³ and Old Christians lived side by side. The character of these communities changed dramatically in 1492 when publically practicing Jews were no longer permitted to remain in Spain, although a number of *conversos* “Judaized”⁴ in private. The Sephardic Jews who fled in 1492 and the *conversos* who left Iberia after this date found themselves throughout the globe. Many moved to locations such as Greece, Italy, and Turkey and later to Northern Europe especially the Low Countries, while others found themselves in Northern Africa and the New World. In this project, I explore how the Sephardic Diaspora maintained community and a united sense of self throughout disparate geographical locations.

In the early modern period, Esther was one of the major links that allowed members of the Sephardic Diaspora to maintain a common identity throughout the globe. Through stories, retellings, and material practices surrounding this figure, Esther became a Sephardic Virgin Mary. I employ the inclusive definition of *Sephardic* as proposed by scholars such as Jonathan Israel. *Sephardic* refers to: (1) Jews who left Spain

²I follow Homi Bhabha in the use of the term hybrid that in my analysis means the in-between, liminal spaces. I also employ the theoretical construct of the *converso* in order to explore this third space. In accord with Marjorie Garber, “The ‘third’ is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis” (11).

³I will use the term *conversos* [converted] throughout this book. This term is interchangeable with New Christians.

⁴Inquisition manuscripts refer to those *conversos* suspected and brought to trial for being false converts and labeled *judaizantes* or judaizers.

before politics of conversion were in place and whose worship was never interrupted, (2) *conversos* who returned to Judaism in foreign lands, (3) crypto-Jews who observed Jewish ritual in secret and Catholic ritual in public, and (4) *converso* Jews living in Iberia or in the diaspora who fully accepted the Catholic faith. Dispersed geographically, they maintained a common identity through language and written texts. More texts were written in the early modern period in Castilian about Esther than any other female old-testament biblical figure. It is significant that these various notions of community, religious hybridity, and secret identity are contested by interpretations of a female figure.⁵

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Arguably the most important of the confessional and ethnic identities in flux in fifteenth-century Iberia was that of the Jew/*converso*/crypto-Jew. Anti-Jewish sentiment and prejudice alternated with periods of pro-Jewish policy over centuries and the expulsion brought to a head the policy of persecution.⁶ While Iberian Jewish life transformed dramatically between the first mass baptisms in Spain in 1391 and the subsequent exile in 1492, many elements of Jewish tradition continued to shape Iberian life in the Peninsula and in the New World. Peoples of Jewish lineage continued to practice their faith across the Iberian empire albeit in different ways.

The year 1391 changed the way families and communities were configured throughout Spain. Before, Jews lived openly alongside Muslims and Christians. Fray Vicente Ferrer waged campaigns against Jews and established anti-Semitic laws. He is responsible for the conversion of many Jews to Catholicism under campaigns of large-scale baptisms.

⁵Although there are many source texts for this biblical story and versions in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew I base my analysis on the biblical source text, the *Biblia Ladinada* (*Escorial I. J. 3*). This text that would have been written by Jewish translators and translated from the Hebrew Scriptures word for word by scholars in fourteenth century Spain. It is based upon a no longer extant fourteenth century manuscript. According to this edition's editor Moshe Lazar, this version can be considered an ancestor of the *Biblia de Ferrara* (iix) which I will also use as it was written by and for *conversos* in the diaspora and published in 1552 in Ferrara.

⁶See David Nirenberg *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*.

The mass baptisms created *conversos*, and according to historian Yitzhak Baer, destroyed the Jewish communities of Castile located in the major cities of Seville, Toledo, Barcelona, and Burgos. After 1391, many Jews chose to convert to Catholicism and many others were forced to convert. Between 1391 and 1492, Jews, *New Christians*, and *Old Christians* continued to live alongside one another. Some New Christians were committed to their new faith while others secretly maintained their Jewish traditions, nourished by their openly practicing Jewish neighbors.⁷ Families and communities became divided along religious lines: some chose to convert and others did not. It is during this time of transition that we see the creation of new categories that represent identities: Jew, New Christian or *converso*, Old Christian, and crypto-Jew.⁸

The Inquisition was established in 1478 and in 1483 the first *auto-de-fé*⁹ in Castile occurred when Tomas de Torquemada became Inquisitor General. This was followed by an *auto-de-fé* in Aragon in 1485. Although many scholars agree that the Inquisition in part was created to reform practices within the Catholic Church, for scholars such as Yitzhak Baer: “The entire purpose of the Castilian Inquisition was none other than to abolish the practice of tolerance” (382). In the first 12 years of its existence, the Inquisition discovered thirteen thousand converts. Stephen Gilman describes the difficulty that *conversos* faced in their everyday lives in Inquisitorial Spain. He elaborates that it was “a world of high social tension undergoing an organized and spectacular form of agony” (79). The Inquisition directly impacted Felipe Godínez, author of the two texts “La Reyna Ester” [The Queen Esther] (1613) and “Amán y Mardoqueo” [Haman and Mordechai] (1628) that are explored in Chap. 3. He wrote these texts on either side of his Inquisitional trial and the works show the effects of the “corrective” behavior of this institution.

Post-expulsion in 1492, Jews were no longer allowed to publicly observe their religion in Spain. The Edict of Expulsion frames this act as a punishment against wrong-doing judaizers and not a policy of

⁷Roth shows that on the Jewish holiday of Passover, baptized Jews would go to their Jewish neighbors for unleavened bread.

⁸*Anusim* is the Hebrew word for crypto-Jew and many Spanish scholars opt for this terminology. Many other Spanish scholars use the term *converso*.

⁹*Auto-de-fé* or ‘act-of-faith’ was the public ritual of penitence performed by the Inquisition to punish those found and tried as apostates or heretics of the Catholic faith.

homogenizing exclusion. According to this document, judaizers were degrading the Catholic faith by communicating with their Christian neighbors and potentially passing on their now outlawed religious practices. We read in the Edict of Expulsion: “algunos malos cristianos que judaizaban ... hera mucha causa la comunicaci3n de los jud3os con los cristianos” (392). [Some bad Christians who judaized ... were the cause of interaction between Jews and Christians] (*my translation*). Here two different groups are attacked: there are *judaizantes* or judaizing Christians who maintained Jewish practices and Jews who tried to convert Christians. Jews were constructed as contagious members of society. This language of contagion and disease would subsequently be used to wage ethnic wars that separated Old and New Christians from posts that could be held in the government and the church. Crucially for purposes of this study, many of the aspects of this contagious rhetoric were placed upon the female body. The female figure became treated as a negative agent who passed impure blood through childbirth and lactation. The Edict continues to describe faithful Christians who were tricked by their Jewish neighbors who desired to “subtraer de nuestra santa fe” (392) [undermine our holy faith] (*my translation*). In the push for homogeneous Catholic nation building, the Jewish and judaizing *converso* enemy was underscored. After 1492, openly practicing Jews disappeared from Spain, but many *conversos*¹⁰ continued Jewish rituals and practices in private spaces. Jews were officially expelled; however, the converted known as *conversos* or as New Christians were allowed to remain. Those who did remain were treated as second class citizens with limited access to positions in the government and church. The expulsion did not eradicate Jewish influence on the peninsula. Edicts such as that of the Expulsion influenced the creation of religious texts produced by Christians within Iberia as we will see in Chap. 2 with the *autos sacramentales*.

The Book of Esther resonates strongly with the *conversos* and the plight of Spanish New Christians in the early modern period precisely because their situations mirror each other. We read in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* how the antagonist Haman constructs Jews as the *other* in Persian. His rhetorical strategy is to villainize the Jewish people. The story of survival in the diaspora is celebrated because at the end of the story Haman is mercilessly defeated and the Jews emerge victorious from

¹⁰ *Conversos* were also referred to as or *judeoconversos*.

their peril. The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* presents both the biblical Hebrew version and the Greek biblical translation of the Esther story. We read how these two versions construct the Jew as the *other*¹¹ in the following two passages:

There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them. (712)

We understand that this people, and it alone, stands constantly in opposition to every nation, perversely following a strange manner of life and laws, is ill-disposed to our government, doing all the harm that they can so that our kingdom may not attain stability. (1418)

The Greek retelling relates that Haman had this anti-Jewish sentiment written down in and distributed throughout the Persian Empire. The echoes to the Edict of Expulsion and the public postings by the Inquisition cannot be dismissed.

The Edict of Expulsion and the subsequent policies of exclusion created figures who were marked and categorized as religious *others*. The *converso* figure became a religious *other* in Iberia. For Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, this *other* is conceived of as a subaltern subject. Jews and *converso* figures challenge subaltern subjectivities because Jews were simultaneously members of an economically and educationally elite society, yet they were also persecuted as a minority for judaizing. Historian Eleazer Gutwirth shows that many Jews participated in royal life as courtiers and advisors to the king, and although official policy limited their participation as *conversos* in public posts many continued in their roles. In the New World, crypto-Jews were categorized as members of the “Republic of Spaniards” yet at the same time they were persecuted as judaizers for not participating in the Catholic faith.

¹¹There have been many translations of the biblical Book of Esther. The surviving Hebrew manuscripts do not contain some of the information found in the Greek text. Jews and Protestants follow the Hebrew manuscript whereas Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians accept them as part of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. As I study the impact of the Book of Esther in an Iberian context that is both Jewish and Catholic, both of the versions are relevant to this discussion (Winn Leith 707–708).

The figure of the *converso* disrupts the binary that divides Jew from Christian. As Graizbord elaborates: “the very existence of Judeoconvertos confounded traditional meanings of religious community and religious identity” because *conversos* were not one or the other but part of both (2). Graizbord’s theorization of the *converso* and their role in society fits well with Marjorie Garber’s conception of the ‘third’ as “a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge” (11). Echoing the idea of limits constructed around borders developed by theorists including Jacques Derrida, *conversos* constantly question the limits of identity because they exist at the limit between two spaces. Discussing *converso* identity is uncomfortable both for *conversos* and for the larger society of normative Jews and Catholics because they are not one or other, but both.¹² *Conversos* in their very existence challenge the state orthodoxy. While many authors including Cervantes who in *Don Quijote* writes for the integration and incorporation of *moriscos*¹³ into Castilian Spanish society, and Alonso de Cartagena and Lope de Barrientos who eloquently defend *conversos*, the removal and integration of bodies was of prime concern in this period.¹⁴ As a binary gender ideology developed clearly dividing male and female roles in early modern Spain, bodies, especially female bodies of Jewish or Muslim descent were considered contaminating agents. Through breast milk and through sex, women could transmit racial-ethnic impurities. The focus on the female body and her identity is a fundamental aspect in this book, and we will further develop these ideas in the next section.

Throughout the twentieth century, scholars have argued about the religious nature of *conversos* and their practices. Some scholars have rejected their connection to Judaism, whereas others categorize Jews and *conversos* within the same group. Scholars that participate in the Jerusalem

¹²I use the term ‘normative’ to refer to Jewish communities that were officially allowed religious freedom of worship such as communities located in Ferrara, Italy and Amsterdam.

¹³*Moriscos* refers to the converted Muslim population of Spain. They were made to convert to Christianity much like the Jews in the early sixteenth-century.

¹⁴Alonso de Cartagena in his *Defensorium unitatis christianae* defends *conversos*. He describes the *converso* as the *novus homo* or the New Man, and rationalizes the conversion of the Jew to Catholicism as continuity. According to Bruce Rosenstock, Cartagena develops a *converso* theology where “the belief in Christ transcends” ethnic and “blood line divisions” (2).

School including medieval historians, Yitzhak Baer and Haim Beinart, acknowledge *conversos*' connection to normative Judaism. Baer elaborates: "Conversos y judíos constituían un solo pueblo, estaban unidos por lazos de fe y destino y por unas esperanzas mesiánicas que en España adquirieron un color especial, propio de ese pueblo y de ese país" (639). [*Conversos and Jews constitute one people. They were united by bonds of faith and destiny and by Messianic hopes. In Spain, these hopes acquired a special tone that was unique to the Spanish people and to that country*] (*my translation*). Opposed to this idea are scholars such as political historian Benjamin Netanyahu, who rejects *conversos* as connected to the Jewish faith and sees them as neither heroes nor martyrs (1973). He interprets their situation as fraught with the assimilatory pressures of life in the diaspora. Netanyahu postulates: "the overwhelming majority of the *marranos* at the time of the establishment of the Inquisition were not Jews, but detached from Judaism, or rather to put it more clearly, Christians" (3).¹⁵

Américo Castro's research of the Jewish and Muslim influences on Spanish culture in the beginning of the twentieth century paved the way for scholarship concerning the role of ethnic minorities in Iberia. These minority groups were silenced by the re-conquest promulgated by the Catholic Monarchs and recuperated by Franco. Castro classified the three religious groups as different *castas* (religious castes) that equally shaped Iberian life. Castro's idea that *convivencia* or religious and cultural sharing across confessional blocks that defined Iberian life, led to a major debate with literary scholar Claudio Sánchez Albornoz. Albornoz rejected multiculturalism and described a "Spanish" identity or a Castilian *sensibility* that developed out of origins, the same rhetorical strategy that the Catholic Kings advanced. This position interprets the fulfillment of the Iberian Reconquista as a divine act.

Today the debate has moved beyond the inner beliefs of *conversos* and the essentializing question of whether this group really can be considered Jewish. Contemporary scholars instead focus on the issue of cultural liminality. David Graizbord considers *conversos* as an ethnic group and rejects the connection to modern ideas of race. This identity in flux or, as Graizbord formulates: "souls in dispute" paints *conversos* as both outsiders and insiders of Catholic society at the same time (63).¹⁶ Many of these

¹⁵Many scholars have discredited the use of the term "marrano" to describe crypto-Jews due to its anti-Semitic connotations given that in Spanish "marrano" means swine or pig.

¹⁶Jonathan Israel elaborates "Jewish observance moved to ritual syncretism [as] Catholic environments deeply penetrated group consciousness" (108).

Sephardic Jews had contact with each other through economic ties, and as we will see would read the same texts, and recuperated common symbols of identity, central among them the story and the veneration of Queen Esther.

A dynamic relationship developed between the two Iberian nations upon the expulsion. By 1492 only six thousand Jewish families remained in Aragón (Baer 246).¹⁷ The majority of the Jewish population resided in Castile and numbered about thirty thousand families, or 1.5% of the total Castilian population. Significantly, tens of thousands of *conversos* remained practitioners of Judaism (246). Many Spanish Jews fled to Portugal whose Inquisition was not established until 1534 and then returned to Spain after the creation of freedom of movement laws in the 1580s. While many *conversos* moved within the boundaries of Iberia, other Sephardic Jews left Iberia for places like Italy or Amsterdam where they were promised religious freedom. They took their Sephardic heritage and traditions with them. According to Jonathan Israel, Italy offered a space of relative religious tolerance to openly practicing Jews in the early modern period. Similarly, a large group of Portuguese Jews and *conversos* moved to Amsterdam, and established a large community of Sephardic Jews known as the *Nação portuguesa* or the *Portuguese Nation*. I explore this community in depth in Chap. 4 when I analyze the poem “Poema de la Reyna Ester” (1627) by Portuguese *converso*, João Pinto Delgado. Given this tremendous movement in the diaspora, the role of Castilian Spanish also rose in its importance for intellectuals throughout the Sephardic Diaspora. It also became a crucial tool for everyday communication among the Sephardim who lived alongside other languages including Turkish, Arabic or Dutch. For David Wacks, Castilian “became a diasporic Jewish language” (2). Subsequently, Castilian Spanish in the form of *ladino* would take on the characteristics of their new environments.

Spanish has since survived in its various *ladino*¹⁸ forms as they interact with these other languages and shifting zones of contact in the Ottoman Empire and in Northern Africa in its form called *haketia*. In

¹⁷This number that documents the Jewish population before the expulsion does not include *conversos*.

¹⁸The term *ladino* refers to the Spanish language that was spoken at the time of the expulsion by Jews that then changed over time in the diaspora. The Spanish spoken by these Sephardic Jews was modified by the new countries and contexts in which they found themselves. Many times *ladino* developed in isolation and thus preserved many aspects of early modern and medieval Spanish linguistics. Many scholars and linguists today reflect that in contemporary *ladino* one can imagine the sounds of medieval Spanish.

fact, in Turkey, *ladino* survived intact until the twentieth-century due to their 1934 adoption of the Turkish language. Today, sixteenth-century books such as the *Ferrara Siddur* (1552) still stand out as crucial examples of *ladino*, and for the *conversos* exiled in 1492 it provided Jews with the ability to read the stories of their faith in their own vernacular language. Jacob M. Hassan credits the *Ferrara Siddur* with recuperating and revealing aspects of the Spanish language lexicon that were otherwise forgotten (161). The *Ferrara Siddur* among other *ladino* texts were used as a reference for the *Diccionario histórico*. Hassan explains: “la serie de la literatura sefardí, rama de la civilización hispánica que, como merece, ocupa un lugar en el Diccionario histórico de la lengua española” (161)/“The series of Sephardic Literature is an important branch of the Hispanic civilization. It occupies a well-deserved place in the *Historic Dictionary of the Spanish Language*” (*my translation*).

For *converso* subjects in the diaspora, the *Ferrara Siddur* was a central text. Many of the authors of the texts in this book move through-out various nation-states and although they were tied to an Iberian origin, they existed beyond borders. This is especially true for author João Pinto Delgado in Chap. 4 and the Carvajal sisters in Chap. 5. After the expulsion in 1492, many Jews moved to their Portuguese neighbor where religious freedom could be found. Although mass baptisms and Inquisitorial politics followed in this sister-nation, many Spanish and Portuguese *conversos* moved between the two nations. Those Iberian descendants in the Sephardic Diaspora claimed an identity within the Portuguese Nation. This nationality meant that they were members of a nation that existed for the people with shared cultural, religious, and linguistic tradition. National identity was formed outside of the borders of Iberia and thus was diasporic in nature. Daniel Swetschinski reminds us that “in almost every form of expression the Portuguese Jews remained consciously and distinctly Iberian” (285). Common among all “citizens” of the Portuguese Nation are the multiple linguistic, religious and cultural influences that shaped their experiences and their writings and the centrality of biblical figures in their everyday lives. This book engages with the new trends of scholarship that look beyond national borders following scholars including Sharon Kinoshita and Ian Chambers. My work embraces texts that are products of the Atlantic. I also engage with scholars including Barbara Fuchs, Jean Dangler, and René Levine

Melammed as I explore issues of identity in different loci within and outside of the Spanish Empire. In fact, through this project, I develop the idea that the Sephardic Diaspora creates a new type of national identity that exists beyond geographic borders and creates a type of statehood in the diaspora.

Crypto-Jews and *conversos* were the other in plain sight in early modern Europe. Although they lived in diverse geographical contexts, they were still considered threatening and perceived as dangerous to Iberian society because their difference was not measurable. Some comparisons can be drawn to the Muslim presence in the US or France today; these texts express fear of difference that stand in contradistinction to what is considered *American* or *French* or what is *Persian* in the biblical story, or *Spanish* or *New Christian* in Iberia. As such, no official written doctrine exists to which crypto-Judaism can be tied. Crypto-Judaism emerged from oral transmission and fictional compositions by *conversos* throughout the early modern Sephardic Diaspora. Principal among them are biblical retellings including the book of Esther. For subjects in this diaspora, Esther is an instrument of change, a heroine, a figure that passes.¹⁹ She is a model of femininity and somehow complies with norms at very different times.

GENDERED ANALYSIS

The historical realities of the Iberian Empire shaped the way the story of Queen Esther was retold and constructed. Discourses of conquest, both religious and colonial, penetrated the early modern Iberian World and officials framed these conquests in binary gender terms. The empire building and later nation building projects relied not only upon ethnic

¹⁹I am borrowing a Queer Theory terminology of “passing” which is getting by under a dominant identity while carrying a secret identity. For the Queer community, this would be a gay sexual orientation that is not visible until revealed by the subject. This concept functions in a similar fashion for the Jewish community, whereas Judaism is a minority religious affiliation that can be hidden and later revealed by the individual. Scholars including Barbara Fuchs in *Passing for Spain: Cervantes and the Fictions of Identity*, uses this concept to help underline minority and *othered* elements of Spanish society. Similarly, Matthew D. Stroud employs uses a Queer Theory approach in his book *Plot Twists and Critical Turns: Queer Approaches to Early Modern Spanish Theater*.

and religious homogeneity and exclusion but also upon the insistence of gendered divisions and roles. They created distinctions between masculine claims to power and feminine “support” in the domestic sphere. Male conquistadors contrast with the silent, lactating wife, defined by reproduction and emptiness, available to be “filled” in with meaning by her male counterpart. Official discourses of religious conquest also theorized women as societal contaminants. Mary Elizabeth Perry shows that on the basis of gender, symbolic lines and boundaries can be drawn” (*Gender and Disorder* 5–6) and Martínez further elaborates this idea as the “feminization of impurity” whereupon women transmitted racial impurities (*converso* Jewish or Muslim heritage) through breast milk (55). Similarly, religious divisions between the Ibero-Catholic self and *converso* others were also transferred onto women.²⁰ Women were constructed as the responsible parties for communicating ethnoreligious difference.

Within the traditional early modern dichotomy, women were normally categorized within the two-part, Virgin (Mary)/whore (Mary Magdalene) opposition. Following in the theoretical grounding of Simone de Beauvoir’s writings about the female body, Judith Butler maintains “‘The body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriate interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (12). The *conversa* body has particular significance because it was inscribed within both gendered and religious boundaries. Esther emerges as a fascinating female example because she is conceived of changing ways and resonates with different female religious figures including both the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene as well as other Old Testament Jewish figures including Jael, Rebecca, and Judith.

In this early modern moment where anxieties of contamination were displaced onto females and contact with a New World *other* was feminized, early modern humanists theorized women’s role in Iberian society (Martínez 40). These authors were read on both sides of the Atlantic.²¹ Among these writers, two that stand out include Juan Luis Vives, author

²⁰Caroline Bynum Walker shows that women’s bodies were in themselves identified with ordinary food through lactation and the body of Christ (30).

²¹Elizabeth Teresa Howe points out that Vives’s books were distributed and read in New Spain; readers include famous figures such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

of the *Instrucción de la mujer Cristiana* (1524) [Instruction for the Christian Woman], and Fray Luis de León author of *La perfecta casada* (1583) [The Perfect Wife]. These works were frequent wedding gifts for recently married women. A central idea that comes out of Vives' text is that a well-bred woman should be silent: "callar es el gran ornamento de la mujer" (127) [silence is the greatest ornament of a woman] (*my translation*). According to Emilie Bergmann, the feminine identity that Vives elaborates is that of defined absence. This idea resonates with modern feminist theory by Luce Irigaray and Butler among others who describe that "the female sex eludes the very requirements of representation for she is neither 'other' nor 'lack' (15). Fray Luis elaborates that the woman occupies an "estado humilde" or a humble, lesser, inferior status. In these texts we see that the female body and female sexuality take on a central role whereby virginity is linked with the positive qualities of honesty and virtue. Other Iberian texts were also written in this time period that prescribe women's roles in their society. The fifteenth-century *Castigos y doctrinas que un sabio dava a sus hijas* [Punishments and Doctrines that a Wiseman gave to his Daughters], an anonymous decalogue was composed as a set of commandments of sorts for future wives. Fray Martín Alonso de Córdoba wrote *Jardín de nobles doncellas* (1468–1469) [Garden of Noble Young Ladies] and dedicated it to Isabel la Católica. These texts were specifically concerned with regulating the female body and particularly that of the role of the wife in society. This is the very role that launches Esther into the public eye when she becomes queen. There are many parallels between Queen Esther and Queen Isabel. Isabel la Católica in particular troubles traditional notions of femininity because she is a queen with power, but as a woman must remain in many ways submissive and pure in bodily terms.

Many scholars are familiar with the works of Fray Luis de León and Juan Vives in their construction of female virtuosity and the role of women in the early modern period; however, other lesser known authors played a central role in shaping public opinion regarding women. Like Fray Martín Alonso de Córdoba who wrote his text directly for Queen Isabel, these texts were written to educate the Spanish lady of a high social standing. Often these depictions included biblical women who were upheld as models of both behavior and looked to for inspiration. Martín Carillo, Abad of Monte Aragón, wrote *Elogios de mujeres insignes del viejo testamento* (1627) [Praise of Insigne Women from the Old Testament] and María Guevara composed *Desengaños de la corte y mujeres*

valerosas (1664) [*Disappointments of the Court and Valorous Women*]. The former was dedicated to Margaret of the Cross (daughter of the empress María de Austria). According to Rosilie Hernández, this “text functions as an educational tool for a learned royal and noble female audience for whom these exemplary lives simultaneously reiterate and reconfigure acceptable social and imaginary boundaries for early modern female subjectivity” (225). The latter presents an argument for female leadership upon the failing patriarchy in a declining seventeenth-century Spain. In other words, they showed “acceptable female moral and ethical behavior” and used biblical heroines such as Esther, Judith, and Jael as models (226). Of the fifty-four women chronicled in the *Elogios*, twenty-one were depicted in visual form in a chapel that stands to this day in the Capilla de la Virgen de Guadalupe that is situated in the Convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid. Commissioned in 1653 by Sor Ana Dorotea de Austria, daughter of the emperor Rodolfo II. At that time, she was the abbess of the convent. Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo painted the images of these women, among them Queen Esther based upon Martín Carillo’s *Elogios de mujeres*. According to Abraham Díaz Garcia the book alluded to the virtues of each heroine as a prefiguration of the Virgin” (41). Whereas many other churches in this time period boasted paintings of biblical heroines, according to Díaz Garcia this was the most complete cycle that emerged in the seventeenth-century. Shaping the cultural knowledge of the Spanish populace over centuries, Queen Esther has been read about and gazed upon for hundreds of years.

Esther has a long history of Iberian recognition for her important role as we see in Álvaro de Luna’s *Libro de las virtuosas é claras mujeres*. In this fifteenth-century manuscript, he upholds Esther as a model for her beauty, wit and wisdom: “Ester la Reyna, mujer Hebrea, hija del hermano de aquel noble, é prudente cauallero Mardocheo; como quier que por fortuna, é Gloria, é fermosura corporal aquesta Reyna fué muy más noble que todas las otras mujeres del su tiempo, empero mucho fué esclarecida por grandeza de excelente ingenio, é de señalada sabiduría, é de loable firmeza...” (4). [Queen Esther, Hebrew woman, daughter of the prudent and noble brother of the gentleman Mordachai; like one that by fortune, and glory, and beautiful body, this queen was more noble than all other women of her time, however all of this was enhanced by the greatness of her ingenuity, uncommon wisdom, and praiseworthy solidity...] (*my translation*). For Jewish readers, she embodies a particular type of religiosity based upon her ability to pass and as a minority to

partake in the dominant culture. Tikva Frymer Kensky explores that in the book of Esther, beauty functions as a tool that for the first time in the bible is used to influence the outcome of her situation. Whereas in the story of Judith, beauty is used as a weapon to save Israel, “Esther became the model for the behavior and salvation of Jews in the diaspora” (335).

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

I rely upon three biblical source texts throughout this monograph: the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, the *Ferrara Siddur* and the *Biblia Latinada*. I use the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (2010) which provides both the book of Esther accepted by the Hebrew and Protestant communities and also presents the Greek version containing additional Apocrypha chapters which is used by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. As previously discussed, the *Ferrara Siddur* (1552) was produced by and for the *converso* population in the diaspora and was likely read by many *converos* in this study. Finally, I will refer to the *Biblia Latinada* which is ancestor of the *Ferrara Siddur*. Although the original fourteenth-century manuscript is now lost today, we preserve a third generation of this Spanish-Jewish translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Lazar iix). Commissioned by Jewish translators with Christian patrons, authors including Felipe Godínez would have likely been exposed to this Iberian text. For ease of readership in the analysis sections, I will refer to the various characters using their English names; Esther (Ester), Vashti (Basti), Ahasueros (Asuero), Haman (Amán), Mordechai (Mardoqueo). However, I will use the original Castilian names of characters when citing directly from the various texts.

Esther is such a compelling figure because she hides her minority status and reveals it at much personal risk in order to save the Jewish people. Since its Hebrew inception, late fourth or early third-century BCE, the book of Esther has been told and retold in translation—first in Greek in the Septuagint, and then in Latin and vernacular versions. This story is imbued with value and in its retellings meaning is layered and reflects difference. The Book of Esther itself supports the concept of a *Sephardic difference* because it has a marginal status within the Hebrew canon due to its late addition and because it does not mention God.²² As we know, the Book of Esther tells the story of how a Jewess, Esther,

²²According to Mary Joan Winn Leith it was only accepted into the cannon of biblical texts in the third or fourth centuries BCE (707).

becomes queen of a non-Jewish empire and saves her people from annihilation. The text, and in its various iterations, imagines a Jewish Queen who assimilates, passes, and treats the idea of self-fashioning for its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences. It also explains the Jewish holiday and feast of Purim. Telling the story of Esther necessarily reveals the ideological atmosphere of its retelling. In this way, I follow Naomi Seidman in her theorization of translation as a “narrative, read not as a transparent truth but rather as ideologically marked ‘emplotment’” (3). In this book I read these different ‘emplotments’ or how this biblical text is used strategically in different historical periods to tell a story that is both relatable in the society that is doing the telling, and how in many instances tells the public how to behave and which values it should uphold. Most of these retellings within Iberia would have followed the Catholic Septuagint, although some Jews in the diaspora might have had access to the Spanish language *Ferrara Siddur* composed in seventeenth-century Italy by and for the Jewish-Iberian population living there.

The story of Esther as recuperated in the *Ferrara Siddur* also establishes gender norms that resonate with contemporary gender norms for women. The king in searching for a wife is looking for a virgin, and Esther is able to transgress norms in other ways precisely due to her virginity “busquen a el rey moças virgins buenas de vista” (148). [The king sought good-looking young virgins] (*my translation*). Material practices are central to the role that Esther takes on in this biblical text. They resonate with the norms that were espoused by Fray Luis de León and Juan Vives in creating the idea of the perfect woman as a wife even for Queen Isabel la Católica, she had to supersede her gendered status to be a reigning monarch, but had to uphold her essential female role as a wife. We read in the *Ferrara Siddur* “doze meses, que assi se cumplan dias de sus afeyetes; seis meses en olio de Mirrha, y seis meses en especias, y en afeytes de las mujeres” (149). [12 months, through which time she spent every day doing beauty treatments; 6 months in Myrrh oil, and 6 months in spices, and other treatments for women] (*my translation*). She was made a queen through grace and mercy: “resabio gracia, y merced delante del mas que todas las virgenes, y puso corono del reyno en su cabeça, y fizola Reynar en lugar de Uasti” (149). [Unparalleled

grace, and showing more mercy than all the other virgins, the king put the crown of the kingdom on her head, and made her reign in place of Vashti] (*my translation*).

In Chap. 2, I compare two types of performance: the series of tapestries “Esther and Ahasueros” (1490) displayed in the Palacio de la Seo in Zaragoza, Spain and the two Iberian *autos sacramentales*: *Auto del Rey Asuero quando descompuso a Basti* [*Auto when the King Ahasueros Undid Vasti*] and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando aborco a Aman* [*Auto when the King Ahasueros Hung Haman*] (1501). 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 non-gender compliant women and punish those who do not respect the power of the king and his empire.

Chapter 3 explores three different Iberian manifestations of Queen Esther. The model text and most well-known is *La Hermosa Ester* [*The Beautiful Esther*] (1610), written by renowned Golden Age playwright Lope Félix de Vega Carpio. This text sets the stage for Iberian representation of the Esther story in this period. Performed in public spaces in Spain, many early modern subjects including author, Felipe Godínez likely would have seen Lope de Vega’s theatrical representation and his works respond to the Lope milieu. His two texts, written on either side of his incarceration and Inquisition trial: “La Reyna Ester” (1613) [The Queen Esther] and “Amán y Mardoqueo” (1628) [Haman and Mordachai] reflect the “corrective behavior” he received by the Inquisition.

In Chap. 4, the story of Esther is removed from Iberia and relocated and retold within the Portuguese Community in the Sephardic Diaspora. In the *Poema de la Reyna Ester* (1627) [*Poem of Queen Esther*], we encounter a view of Iberia from the outside. This poem betrays a longing for homeland and an exploration of the trials encountered in the diaspora by Iberian Jewish *conversos*. Author João Pinto Delgado, a *converso* Jew from Portugal, reconnected with the Jewish faith in Amsterdam before moving to France. This poem celebrates the Jewish faith and the Jewish people, and especially the idea of overcoming adversity and flourishing in a new context. Like other texts composed in the larger Sephardic Diaspora, Delgado’s poem carefully upholds and celebrates Esther as a heroine and savior of the Jewish people.

In the last chapter, I highlight the role that Queen Esther had for crypto-Jewish women in the diaspora. Isabel de Carvajal and her

sister Leonor de Carvajal lived in New Spain and were central figures in upholding and furthering the Jewish faith. Whereas Judaism is a patriarchal religion, crypto-Judaism is a matriarchal religion specifically because of the heightened role that women played when public roles of the religion were no longer permitted. In this chapter, we will see the practical accommodations of the Esther text for real crypto-Jewish women including material practices of the body and the home.

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 Hombria 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, Hombria 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 Tournai” (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 Ahasuerus 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 Vashti’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 prenuptial 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 Ahasueros* 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 descompuso a Basti* (QDB) [Auto when King Ahasueros Undid Vashti] and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando ahorco 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 descompuso a Basti* as: QDB, and *Auto del Rey Asuero quando ahorco 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 mexicos 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 desconpuso 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 Commentaries] 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 ansi. (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 aborrecida
 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

²¹The *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 eí 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 formosiar 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 viuit 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 condemnationem 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.

A Jewish Heroine in Early Modern Spain

In this chapter, I explore three different Iberian manifestations of Queen Esther. These texts show how biblical figures were utilized in the Counter-Reformation period to weave a nationalistic discourse of exclusion and power. They also reflect commonly held values about the role of women in this society. All three works are *comedias* and like the tapestries and the *autos sacramentales* were written to be performed before an audience. The genre of the *comedia* is crucial to our interpretation of the texts as nation-building tools of the Iberian Empire. Anthony J. Cascardi shows the “theatrical aesthetic of the *comedia* was invaluable in legitimizing and in strengthening the power of political absolutism in Spain” (3). The *comedia* was one of the rhetorical tools that Spain used in this period to promote a society with an orthodox religion and policies; at the same time, it had institutions including the Inquisition that served to control the thoughts and actions of the populace. One of the high points of Inquisitorial activity coincided with the acme of popularity of the *comedia* genre.

The model text and most well-known is *La hermosa Ester* (1610) [The Beautiful Esther], written by renowned Golden Age playwright Félix Lope de Vega Carpio. This play sets the stage for Iberian representation of the Esther story in this period. I also consider Felipe Godínez’s two *comedias* written before and after his Inquisitorial trial and incarceration: *Comedia Famosa de la Reyna Ester* (1613) [Famous Comedy of Queen Esther] and *Comedia Famosa de Amán y Mardoqueo* (1653)

[Famous Comedy of Haman and Mordechai].¹ A comparative reading of Godínez's *comedias* reflects the "corrective behavior" that he received from the Inquisition.² As they were performed in public spaces including Seville, Godínez would likely have seen Lope's theatrical representation. According to Alice Goldberg, Godínez's works directly respond and engage with the Lope milieu of theatrical interpretation and questioning of social homogeneity (1). Similarly, Godínez's *La Reyna Ester* was enacted in Seville.

These plays clearly present one of the major contradictions of early modern Iberia; they simultaneously celebrate a Jewish foundational biblical heroine while telling another story about the creation of loyal subjects of an empire that officially excludes Jews. They also tell a story about the fulfilling of gender norms and *La Hermosa Ester* carefully outlines female obedience and the proper behavior for women. Lope de Vega's text upholds traditional gendered notions of identity in the early modern period. This work celebrates Esther as an exceptional woman for her singular following of gendered comportment rules. Just as inquisitors were fully aware that Esther was a central figure for practitioners of crypto-Judaism, we find this tension reflected in Godínez's two versions of the Esther story (Goldberg 8). In the text written before Godínez was brought up on Inquisition charges, *La Reyna Ester*, we see a celebration of Esther as a figure that transcends her role as an obedient woman and takes on qualities that compare to the Virgin Mary. In the revisionist text that Godínez writes after his trial, *Amán y Mardoqueo*, Esther's role is diminished and Godínez no longer questions the homogenous society in which he lives. In accord with Andrew Herskovitz, as the former was "condemned by the Inquisition" the latter was written to "appease the Holy Office" (58).

In *La Reyna Ester*, Godínez uses many of the elements presented in the Lope text regarding female identity, yet in terms of religiosity he celebrates Judaism and Jewish rituals. He presents an Esther that is pious both as a Jew and as a Persian (i.e. Christian). Here, Esther is depicted as a *converso* subject who straddles Jewish and Christian ideals. Her existence within an officially homogenous Iberia has multiple facets

¹ *Comedia Famosa de Amán y Mardoqueo* is also known by the title *La horca para su dueño* [The Gallows for its Master].

² For the rest of this book, I will refer to the former text by *La Reyna Ester*, and the latter as *Amán y Mardoqueo*.

and is shaped by a plural context. Finally, in *Amán y Mardoqueo*, we are instructed how to shift the focus away from Esther as heroine in order to celebrate Catholicism and return to the norm of a homogenous society. Godínez highlights many aspects of Christianity and instead of upholding Jewish traditions—he replaces the celebratory aspect of Judaism with that of Catholicism. *La Reyna Ester* and *Amán y Mardoqueo* present a dynamic portrayal of the contradictory nature of Inquisitorial Spain. They also reveal the treatment of a learned *converso* subject who was both an author and a priest.

How then did Esther play for both teams, *converso* society and Christian Spain, in the eventeenth-century? In the texts, we will see how the minor differences reveal a historical context in flux in which subjects learned to relate to a changing society that officially supported homogeneity even when the reality of multiple identifications led to heterodox practices. Mary Elizabeth Perry encourages scholars to use gendered scholarship to be aware not only of presence but also of elements left unsaid. In highlighting absence, we will be able to see the cracks in the national rhetoric of homogeneity and exclusion. I follow Cascardi's understanding that "Spaniards made use of the *comedia* in order to legitimate a structure of social relations founded on the domination of one group by another ..." (27). As we have seen, domination within Spanish society served to place Old Christians above New Christians or *conversos*. The domination that occurred from within served to create a hierarchy of people and practices, and although they coexisted, heterodox practices were carefully monitored and punished. Reading these Esther *comedias* allows us to understand many of the complexities of early modern Iberian society.

Esther is also an intriguing subject because of her queenly status. She relates to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene as well as to an important Iberian Queen, Isabel la Católica. Both of these queens supersede the norms of obedience ascribed to women in this time period due to their queenly status. They both carefully relied upon gendered norms of virtuosity and religious norms of piety in order to wield power and craft policies of state. As Barbara Weissberger adeptly reflects in her book *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power*, the female monarch "appropriates and redirects patriarchal norms and institutions [in order to] further political power and goals" (xv). This is the paradox of early modern queenship. Although Esther was hardly a contemporary queen for the *converso* people, she like Isabel was a model of virtue for

the populace. Although Esther is not an early modern queen, the texts written about her in the early modern period construct Esther as their *conversa* queen. Esther and Isabel also interrupted patriarchal norms because both figures wielded power not normally bestowed upon women. Weissberger postulates that an “anxious masculinity” existed in Isabelle’s reign; she defines it as the “threat of feminine gender and sexuality in the political culture of the Isabelline period” (2003, 1). These very same gender and sexuality threats were in play in the different retellings of the Esther story in this chapter.

Isabel’s role was contradictory at points, she was constructed as a model of chastity that furthered society in her roles as domestic wife and mother. At the same time, she wielded power that women normally did not; she rose above her gender status due to royal exceptionalism. Whereas the Catholic Queen established her power by the expulsion of the same “contaminating agents” (Jews and Muslims) that included Esther, Esther was celebrated as crypto-Jewish Queen that hid her identity in order to be accepted and later save the Jewish people (xiv). In addition, both of these queens had an important literary presence in the early modern period. As Weissberger explains, Isabel’s power as queen was greatly formed by literary representation. Her public image was shaped by contemporary authors and she had a hand in the construction of her power through the texts that were written about her reign. As we have seen throughout this book, Esther took on an important and visible role in the literature of Iberian society.

Esther’s entry into the court reflects her identity as a crypto-member of Persian society—a fact that would have resonated for a highly *converso* society in the early modern period. This equivocation is reflected in the fifteenth-century Iberian *Biblia ladinada*: “non rreconto Ester su pueblo e su generaçion que Mordecai mando a ella que non lo rrecontase” (688). [Esther did not tell of her origins nor her people as Mordechai commanded her not to tell] (*my translation*). The *Biblia ladinada* is the Escorial edition of the bible in *romance* and would have been read widely by contemporary Spanish subjects, likely by authors such as Lope and Godínez.³ It is clear how this story resonated with members

³In the introduction, I presented the *Ferrara Siddur* as the most important Castilian version of the bible that was read frequently by *conversos* and crypto-Jews in the Sephardic Diaspora. We will return to this text in Chaps. 4 and 5 when we discuss figures that took part of the Sephardic Diaspora: João Pinto Delgado in Amsterdam, and Isabel and Leonor

of the Spanish Empire post-Expulsion; many people were living double lives as *conversos* where they publically practiced one religion while privately observing another. Some converts truly believed and practiced Catholicism, but had to hide their origins and fake *limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood] requirements in order to secure jobs and avoid discrimination. Needless to say, they lived in a context of fear of being outed.⁴ To these groups, Esther was a triumphant figure who revealed her true identity and saved her people. In Chaps. 4 and 5, we will explore how Esther was upheld as a Jewish savior who emerged from within the Jewish community for *converso* and Sephardic exiles living in the diaspora. In this chapter, I will explore how Esther was a relatable figure in Catholic Iberian society. We will see how the persecution of the Jews in the biblical narrative is a relatable and clear parallel with the historical reality of Jewish persecution in post-expulsion Spain.

ESTHER AMONG CHRISTIANS: *LA HERMOSA ESTER*

La hermosa Ester is a three-act *comedia* that was first performed in Madrid on May 10, 1610. The theatrical genre is of particular importance when discussing this work. Renowned Golden Age playwright and author Lope de Vega wrote this play to be performed before the famous *corrales* or open air-theaters for the seventeenth-century population of post-expulsion Iberia. Critics including Elaine Canning explain that theater can be used to gauge contemporary values. As plays were written to be performed before an audience, they reflect the social and political context from which they

Footnote 3 (continued)

de Carvajal in New Spain. However, in this chapter, we are exploring three texts written by Iberian authors and they would have most likely used the Escorial Edition of the fourteenth-century *Biblia Ladinada* as the source text. Furthermore, the *Ferrara Siddur* would have been included on the list of banned books by the Inquisition.

⁴Matthew D. Stroud mobilizes a Queer Studies analysis of *La hermosa Ester*. Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of the story of Esther as a "model for a certain simplified but highly potent imagining of coming out and its transformative potential" (75). Stroud elaborates that Esther begins by "passing" and eventually "forces Ahasueros to confront his willful ignorance, his unknowing as knowing, as he begins to realize that his edict to kill Jews is linked to the beautiful woman he has chosen for his queen" (37).

were written.⁵ Canning also explains that the *comedia de tema religioso* [religious themed comedy] was very popular among seventeenth-century audiences, and the story of Esther would have been familiar to them through oral transmission in the church. The persecution of the Jews is both a central idea in the biblical narrative as well as a historical reality in post-expulsion Spain. Celebrating Esther and her triumph could have offered the *converso* society a means of identification for those who inhabited a dual identity. At the same time, the majority seventeenth-century Spanish population would have identified with Persians, as both populaces had in common that they were members of strong empires looking to gain power abroad. This story, converted into a play, was powerful precisely because it meant different things to different people.

Why did renowned author Lope de Vega choose to write a play celebrating a Jewish heroine in the context of post-expulsion Christian Iberia, especially given that many critics have argued whether Lope was anti-Semitic. I argue that Lope was formed by a multiple and religiously hybrid environment. Living in a *converso* society meant knowing multiple traditions and living according to multiple interpretations. Although only one religion existed officially in Iberia, centuries of coexistence among Jews, Muslims, and Christians led to common practices between these groups. For Canning, it was not merely coincidental that *La hermosa Ester* was published in 1610, the same year as the expulsion of the *Moriscos* from Spain.⁶ As all literary texts within Iberia were subject to Inquisitorial censorship and if they were considered heterodox would appear on the *Index* of prohibited works, retelling a biblical story allowed Lope freedom from the Inquisition and the censors because the bible provided a textually safe space from which he could reflect this hybrid Iberian society.

In early modern Iberian society, a subject's religious background was a topic of primary concern. This was especially the case for *conversos*. The terms *casta* [caste] and *linaje* [lineage] were two categories that constantly

⁵Canning shows this to be the case for other Golden Age dramatists include Mira de Amescua, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón de la Barca (10).

⁶Elaine Canning, Matthew D. Stroud, A. A. Sicroff, and Roberta Zimmerman Lavine are a few critics who have written about Lope's anti-Semitic or pro-Jewish tendencies. See the dissertation of Roberta Zimmerman Lavine: "The Jew and the Converso in the Dramatic Works of Lope de Vega".

bounced around the peninsula. These concepts gained importance with the *limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood] statutes which denied people of Muslim or Jewish extraction positions in government, the church, and travel to the New World. *Conversos* had to spend considerable efforts to prove their *limpieza* if they wanted to participate in any of these sectors. Through these purity of blood statutes, religious and ethnic background became blurred in this period. Lope uses Haman's character to attack heterogeneous members (*Moriscos* and *conversos*) as second class citizens of Iberian society. Haman reflects upon a similar construct in Persia while discussing Mordechai: "Que tal su bajeza es/y tan vil es su linaje" (124b). [How lowly he is/and how vile his lineage] (*my translation*).⁷ For Haman, Mordechai's identity is defined by his ethno-religious background, which is low and vile. Although Mordechai is an openly Jewish member of Persian society, his background is commented upon in the following passage and Esther does not reveal her connection to Mordechai in order to hide her Jewish identity until the end of the text. She effectively becomes a crypto-Jewish figure because her religious background could have limited her opportunities for being selected as queen and participating at court. Mordechai, reflects upon the connections forged by blood, he says:

Ester, si sola estuvieras,
 ni yo estuviera remiso,
 ni tú de mi sangre huyeras;
 soy tu padre, aunque tu tío. (114a)

Esther, if you were alone,
 or were I reluctant,
 and if you fled from my blood;
 I am your father, although really your uncle.

Esther as a member of this group must become the voice of the majority to save her people. She, like Iberian *conversos*, inhabits two communities simultaneously and has a dual existence. David Graizbord in *Souls*

⁷All the translations of *La hermosa Ester* are my own.

in Dispute formulates that *conversos* are both outsiders and insiders at the same time (63). Esther as a crypto-Jew is an outsider in Persian society, but as queen she is an insider. Like the *conversos* of seventeenth-century Iberia, Esther as queen becomes something different and new. Graizbord elaborates on the idea of this type of dual identity within the early modern period: “the very existence of judeoconversos confounded traditional meanings of religious community and religious identity” because *conversos* were not one or the other but part of both (2). Like the crypto-Jewish Carvajal women I discuss in Chap. 4, living privately as Jews and publically as Christians, Esther for most of the text lives privately as a member of a minority religion and publically within majority Persian society.

One of the initial mechanisms that allows Esther to get close to the king is the act of passing as a member of the dominant Persian society while hiding a minority religious identity. Stroud mobilizes passing as a strategy that connects with privilege and power. He explains: “One who wishes to pass almost without exception wishes to pass as a member of the group with the power and privilege... When one passes, one chooses to use language and obey laws and customs that are not of one’s own group” (50). The first way in which Esther passes as a potential mate for the king is by changing her clothing and hiding her Jewish roots. When she appeals to the power of the king to save the Jewish people, Mordechai advises Esther to keep her identity secret. We see this idea in the following passage:

Véate el Rey, habla al Rey,
 pero quiero, Ester, que adviertas
 que no has de decir tu patria,
 aunque preguntada seas.
 Calla tu pueblo y nación;
 que Dios, de lágrimas tiernas
 destes cautivos movido,
 quiere romper sus cadenas. (109a)

Go to the King, speak to him,
 but I want, for you Esther, to be aware
 that you must not tell of your homeland,

even if you are asked.

Be quiet about your people and your nation;

Because God, of tender tears

moved by these captives,

wants to break their chains.

The text conflates the terms, *pueblo* [people] and *nación* [nation], both referring to the Jewish people who happen to be living in Persia. Similarly, Esther's *patria* [homeland] refers not to Persia but instead to her identity as a Hebrew. This text would have particularly resonated with *conversos* in the diaspora who called themselves *hombres de nação* and considered themselves members of the diasporic Portuguese *nação*. We will discuss this community in depth in Chap. 4 and see how the notion of dual homelands functions in João Pinto Delgado's *La Reyna Ester* created by and for the Portuguese Nation in Amsterdam and in the diaspora.

Similarly, the themes of this play were very relatable to contemporaries in Iberia because many came from *converso* backgrounds of questionable *casta* and *linaje* and were taught to never reveal those elements of their heritage. As *converso* became an identity rather than a descriptor in Iberia, they transformed into something new and different. This group was taught to fear the part of themselves that was Jewish if they wanted to be accepted as full members of Catholic society. Fear of discovery or outing has been transmitted among *converso* communities until the twentieth-century. For example, we see this idea today of the crypto-Jewish community of New Mexico and in Belmonte, Portugal, where community members until very recently did not want to reveal their origins because of internalized fear that was passed down throughout generations and centuries.⁸

⁸For more information on the crypto-Jewish community in New Mexico, see Janet Liebman Jacobs' *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*. Another modern case that reflects secrecy and fear of discovery is the Jewish community of Belmonte, Portugal. This community lived isolated in the mountains of northern Portugal and believed themselves to be the only surviving Jews, until they were "discovered" by anthropologist Samuel Schwartz in the 1920s. They were also fearful and reluctant to reveal their religious identity, which was kept hidden for so many years. Today this community has a synagogue, but secret Jews from surrounding towns are only revealed as Jewish upon funerary rites, which occur in the Jewish cemetery.

The popularity of the Esther story is due to its exploration of relatable themes including that of a dual religious identity. The story particularly resonated with early modern female figures because it reflects the contradictory roles that women had in this period. We remember the conflicting status that Queen Isabel occupied as both submissive female and manipulative and demanding royal. In *La hermosa Ester*, Lope de Vega participates in a contemporary trend that involved authors such as María de Zayas and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who depict strong female characters. Lope imagines a contradictory figure and ultimately celebrates the female heroine who wins her elevated status because she conforms absolutely to traditional standards of femininity. Lope dedicates his text to Doña Andrea María de Castrillo and compares her to Queen Esther:

La hermosura, entendimiento y virtud excelentísima de la hermosa, entendida y virtuosa Ester, de quien dicen las sagradas letras que era en extrema hermosa, de increíble belleza y graciosa y amable en los ojos de todos, ¡a quién se debía más justamente que a V.m., si de sus virtudes, hermosura y gracia se puede decir lo mismo! (102)

Knowledge and virtuous Esther's beauty, understanding and most excellent virtue of her beauty, of whom the sacred texts say she was of extreme and incredible beauty, and gracious kindness in the eyes of all; who deserves this dedication more than your grace, since we can say the same of your virtues, beauty and grace!

The text connects Esther directly to other contemporary virtuous women because they share values including beauty and grace. Although Doña Andrea María de Castrillo is a member of the upper class, as denoted by her title Doña, Lope questions class boundaries with the invention of the character Sirena. The scene that includes Sirena is a creative addition not found in the biblical story; in the play, Sirena wants to become queen and says her background does not matter.⁹ Ahasueros looks for a wife from any part of the empire, allowing Iberian women from different classes and backgrounds, Old or New Christian (who would have composed the Spanish *corrales*) to identify with this play. In the next section of this chapter, we will see that Godínez uses

⁹The creative addition of the Sirena is paralleled by Godínez in his elaborations of Ypólita (a maiden from the countryside) who imagines herself as a candidate for the king.

the creative addition of the couples; Zares and Egeo, and Fileno and Hipólita who according to Alice Goldberg represent the group of Old Christians. Similarly, Mordechai creates a genealogy of other virtuous biblical women in the play:

Vaso de virtudes lleno
 fue Sara, Rebeca y Lía,
 Raquel, Tamar y María,
 hermana del gran Moisés,
 la que cantaba después
 que Israel del mar salía;
 Rehab, Débora y Jahel,
 ilustres mujeres son,
 y la madre de Sansón,
 con Ana la de Samuel,
 Rut y Abigail fiel,
 Abela y la de Tobías,
 Judit, que casi en mis días
 quitó la vida a Holofernes
 porque a su ejemplo gobiernes,
 Ester, las desdichas mías. (119a–b)

A cup filled with virtues
 were Sarah, Rebecca and Leah,
 Rachel, Tamar and Mary,
 sister of the great Moses,
 the one singing after Israel
 came out of the sea;

Rehab and Deborah and Jael,
 are illustrious women,
 and so is Samson's mother,
 together with Samuel's Ana,
 Ruth and faithful Abigail,
 Abela and that of Tobias',
 Judith, who in my time
 almost took Holofernes' life
 may you govern following their example,
 Esther, my own misfortunes.

Lope draws on a constellation of biblical women that connect with contemporary figures in early modern Iberian society. As we have seen, Esther plays an important role in terms of modeling behavior in the works of two contemporaries: Álvaro de Luna's *Libro de las virtuosas é claras mujeres* [Book of Virtuous and Pure Women] and Martín Carillo's *Elogios de mujeres del viejo testamento* [Praises of Women from the Old Testament]. Lope links these women together through the concepts of virtue and beauty, describing both Doña Andrea María de Castrillo and Queen Esther as virtuous. For example, Ahasueros says to Esther when she saved him from a death threat:

Si yo
 tan cuidadosa te veo
 de mi vida y mi salud
 ¿cómo, Ester, a tu virtud
 no he de rendir cuanto soy? (115a)

Seeing you
 so concerned
 about my life and health

how can I not, Esther,
 give all that I am thanks to your virtue?

The concept of virtue was of supreme importance within the context of early modern Spain. In the hierarchy of humanity, women were considered inferior to men. Women could elevate their position through the acquisition of *virtud* (virtue) as elaborated by contemporary scholars Fray Luis de León and Juan Luis Vives. According to the *Diccionario de autoridades* [Dictionary of Authorities] “virtud” is defined as “la facultad, potencia, u actividad de las cosas para producir o causar sus efectos, la eficacia, fuerza, vigor, poder, la integridad de ánimo” (495–496). [The facility, power, or the ability to produce or cause the following effects, effectiveness, strength, vigor, power, and integrity of spirit] (*my translation*). The prefix *vir* comes from *varon* or man, and so it follows that virtue links women to an elevated identity.

According to Emilie Bergmann, the feminine identity on which Vives elaborates is that of defined absence (124–136).¹⁰ Defined absence creates a passive space for women to inhabit in early modern society and denies them a voice and agency. This idea resonates with modern feminist theory by Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler among others. Butler describes that “the female sex eludes the very requirements of representation for she is neither ‘other’ nor ‘lack’ (15). Esther begins the text as a body that acts in accord with Vives’ theorization about women. She does not speak, she is defined absence, but we will see how Esther purposes her femininity to resist Haman’s plan of destruction of the Jewish people.

Like the conflicting and contradictory representations of Queen Isabel that Wiessberger discusses, the identity of women was also clashing in this period. Esther is the heroine of this story, and she is able to act as such because she upholds the standards of femininity that connected Persia to the early modern world. She is a silent ornament to be admired. In the

¹⁰Vives’ text *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* (1524) [Instructions for the Christian Woman] is an instruction manual for women’s behavior. A masculine, authoritative voice narrates the text. He bases his authority on classical Greek and biblical sources pointing to the idea that a well-bred woman is silent, “callar es el gran ornamento de la mujer” (127). [Being quiet is the great ornament of women] (*my translation*). Fray Luis de León wrote *La perfecta casada* (1583) [The Perfect Wife] as a wedding gift for recently married women. In this text Fray Luis shows that women occupy an “estado humilde” [humble state] (155).

following citation, we see that a defining element of Esther's identity is her obedience to her new husband, the king. Esther says to Ahasueros:

Mi humildad, poderoso rey Ahasueros,
 no es digna de besar tu rico estrado;
 mas la obediencia, por quien ser espero
 admitida en tus ojos, me ha forzado
 a osar ponerme en tu real presencia;
 que el mejor sacrificio es la obediencia.
 Supe tu intento y ofrecí mi vida
 y sangre a tu remedio... (111b).

My humility, powerful King Ahasueros,
 I am not worthy to kiss your rich dais;
 but obedience, by means of which I hope
 to be admitted in your eyes, has forced me
 to dare come before your royal presence;
 because the best sacrifice is obedience.
 I knew your intention and I offered my life
 and blood to your aid...

Stroud states that "Ester is accepted as the new queen because she is coded as 'beautiful obedient virgin' rather than 'Jew'" (53). Because Esther complies with gender norms and especially that of a virtuous virgin, she is celebrated as a worthy queen. Her gender identity stands out as more important than her religious identity. Esther's acceptable femininity precedes and in a sense undoes her inferior position of Jewess.

Following the early modern dichotomy of woman as the Holy Virgin or sin in Eve, Vashti contrasts with Esther's virtuous character. She serves as a warning for women who are not obedient. Whereas the king views Vashti as a female body to be controlled and contained, Vashti rejects the prescribed role of female body set before her by the court and her husband.

King Ahasueros describes her physicality within the Petrarchan form of courtly love. Canning points out that when Vashti disobeys Ahasueros, he “becomes the courtly lover that he imitated in speech, aspiring to the love of a woman who is out of his grasp and who ultimately is pushed beyond his reach by his royal advisers” (24). In this context, the unattainability of a would-be lover of unapproachable social class is discordant. The king is of unassailable authority and sees beauty and virtue in female compliance and possession. While satisfying the literary device of courtly love, Vashti loses her throne and position because she resists ideas of womanhood that conceive of women as bodies to be objectified and possessed.

Beauty in this story is the quality that allows Esther to pass as a member of the dominant society and is the tool that allows her to save her people. In many ways, the text upholds the accepted discourse of the time, which places the woman in the home and appreciates her as a silent ornament to be admired. When looking for a new queen, beauty is likened to strength: “Buscar tantas mujeres, que entre tantas/haya alguna hermosura tan valiente/que mate la memoria de la ausente” (108a). [Looking at so many women, that among them/there would be one whose beauty is so strong/that she kills the memory of the one who is now absent]. Esther is permitted entry into court because, unlike Vashti—she allows herself to be objectified. Esther is paraded as an ornament to be admired, but she is aware of the power that her beauty holds. She makes concessions, allowing herself to be objectified to gain access to the king, and attains the larger goal of saving her people. She purposes her beauty as a site of resistance and becomes a useful model heroine for *conversos* precisely because of these concessions that she makes. She compromises on some things, but not on those that are fundamental. That is what being a *converso* means in Iberia—the tenuous strategic navigation of two worlds for survival. We read in the text:

¡Inmenso Dios, vuestra soy!

Vuestra grande omnipotencia

por instrumentos tan flacos

suele obrar cosas como estas.

Débora rigió a Israel:

dadme entendimiento y fuerzas para saber agradaros,

pues que yo os doy la obediencia. (109a)

Immense God, I am yours.

Your great omnipotence,

by instruments as weak,

generally brings things like these.

Deborah commanded Israel:

give me understanding and strength to know how to please you,

as I give you obedience.

Here, Esther describes herself as an instrument of God and as an obedient woman. She is objectified for a purpose—to save her people. Salvation in this context resonates with both Catholic and Jewish people. Assuring salvation upon death is a central aspect of the Catholic religious agenda. Jewish people in the early modern period looked for rescue from religious oppression. In this story, Esther represents and stands up for the Jewish people. We see this idea in a passage by Mordechai, who says:

es dueña Ester de todos sus sentidos,

por dicha, para bien de los hebreos,

que lloramos cautivos las memorias

de nuestra amada patria, de la santa

Jerusalén, desde los tristes días

que venció Donosor a Jeconías. (112a)

Esther is in command of all of her senses,

joyfully, for the good of all the Hebrews,

who, captives, have cried the memories

of our beloved homeland, of the saint

Jerusalem, since the sad days when

Donosor overcame Jeconiah.

This passage directly references the Babylonian expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem upon the deposition of King Jeconiah in the sixth-century B.C.E. From this quotation, we can draw parallels between Jerusalem and Spain, the beloved homelands. Although Spain is not the original biblical homeland, it is upheld for the Sephardic people as a second home from which they were bitterly expelled and sent into diaspora. We will see this idea of homeland in the Iberian landscape profoundly reflected in the Chap. 4 in *La Reyna Ester*, by Pinto Delgado. In the beginning of the text Esther says:

Me voy quedando sola
entre enemigos de mi pueblo hebreo
que el mar de mi tristeza de ola en ola
me lleva al golfo en que morir me veo. (106a)

I am all alone
among enemies of my Hebrew people
and the sea of my sadness, from wave to wave,
takes me to the gulf on which I see my own death.

Esther is an orphan, which is comparable to the situation of the Jewish people who do not have a country. As Mordechai says: “lloran en tierra ajena perseguidos” (106b). [They cry, persecuted, in foreign lands].

Esther reveals her true religious identity and saves her people by appealing to the king. Risking her life, she reveals her Jewish identity to Ahasueros:

Cuando vine a tu palacio
obediente al mandamiento
de mi Rey y mi señor,
callé por muchos respetos
el decirte que era hebrea. (130a)

When I came to your palace
 obedient of the command
 of my King and my sir,
 I kept quiet for many reasons
 and did not tell you that I was a Jew.

Because Ahasueros loves his wife, he makes concessions for the people she represents. He effectively undoes the role of the *limpieza de sangre* statutes within the play. The king tells Mordechai that he will be esteemed precisely because of the blood that he shares with his ancestors:

lo mismo será estimar
 la sangre de tus abuelos.
 Hoy verás lo que mereces;
 dame, Mardoqueo, luego
 tus brazos. (130b)

it will be the same to esteem
 the blood of your grandparents.
 Today you will see what you deserve;
 Mordechai open,
 your arms.

He accepts the Jewish people and converts them into valued and respected members of Persian society. Ahasueros offers to Esther and her people liberty, life, and freedom in his kingdom: “yo les ofrezco/la libertad y las vidas;/entrad, dichosos hebreos(131a). [I offer you/liberty and life;/enter, fortunate Hebrews]. The play rewards Esther for revealing her identity and coming out of the proverbial closet. In the text *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick elaborates: “The story of Esther seems a model for a certain simplified but highly potent imagining of

coming out and its transformative potential” (75). The play ends with a celebration of religious freedom and tolerance, in which the audience is encouraged to participate. The celebration includes musicians and dancing, exciting the spectators in the *corrales* of Madrid:

Hoy salva a Israel
 la divina Ester.
 Hoy, Ester dichosa,
 figura sagrada
 de otra Ester guardada
 para ser esposa
 más pura y Hermosa,
 de más alto Rey.
 Hoy salva a Israel
 la divina Ester. (131a–b)

Today Israel is saved
 by the divine Esther.
 Today, joyful Esther,
 sacred figure
 of another Esther who was kept
 to be a wife
 the most pure and beautiful,
 for the most esteemed King.
 Today Israel is saved
 by the divine Esther.

It is telling that even at the end of the play when Esther emerges victorious, she is a woman divided between her role as queen and Jewish savior, and dutiful wife.

The play is about the negotiation between multiple identities. The people in the *corrales* of Madrid actively participated in the celebration of the hybrid and the multiple backgrounds that comprised Iberia when they attended *La hermosa Ester*. Instead of denouncing heterodoxy, which was the rule in seventeenth-century Spain, they celebrate it. Esther could be both queen and Jewess. This play celebrates an individual who is a model of resistance and accommodation, and offers a relatable figure that fits in with contemporary standards of femininity that both women and men could identify with. Esther transgressed the role of obedient female, but did so while maintaining accepted standards prescribed to females. Because of the characteristics of virtue, obedience, and beauty, Esther saves her people. As Canning states, this play “demonstrates how the underdog, in this case a woman and Jew, cannot only survive but succeed in a climate of persecution” (43). While beauty and virtue trump other values represented in the text, *La hermosa Ester* presents all the key components in play in early modern society for both Old and New Christians. This play upholds an Esther that is linked to Queen Isabel, both who live according to contemporary standards of femininity. Esther’s position and identity challenge the status quo, but her compliant actions reveal an exceptional woman that is virtuous, relatable, and easily accepted because of her beauty. In the next set of texts, we will see two retellings that are deeply shaped by the milieu created by Lope in *La hermosa Ester*. Also deeply shaped by the historical realities of Counter-Reformation Iberia, *converso* author Felipe Godínez tells the story of an Esther who uses obedience, compliance and her beauty to wage a type of quiet resistance in a hostile world.

ESTHER AMONG CONVERSOS: *LA REYNA ESTER*

The hybrid and *converso* environment in which Lope de Vega’s *La hermosa Ester* suggests becomes personal in the texts of Felipe Godínez. In many ways he used Lope’s text as a model; structurally and thematically there are many similarities. Both *Comedia de la Reyna Ester* (1613) and *Comedia de Amán y Mardoqueo* (1653) are three-act plays and tell the Esther story using Golden Age literary tropes and rhetorical strategies. The use of the genre of the *comedia* is important because as Anthony J. Cascardi shows, the literature of this period was deeply shaped by tensions at the social level. According to Cascardi literature is a social force that “actively propos[es] solutions to historical conflicts

that seem unresolvable by any other means” (1). Although these plays can be analyzed for their own literary merit and for the story that they tell, we would be remiss not to consider some of the biographical aspects that impacted Godínez’s work. I argue that his life and work exist at the intersection of multiple traditions. In fact, the texts that we will consider in this chapter reflect the expression of his mixed faith. Godínez was a *converso*, a Doctor of Philosophy and an ordained priest. Reading *La Reyna Ester* alongside *Amán y Mardoqueo* sheds light upon the creative output of a *converso* author and the results of his “re-education” at the hands of the Inquisition. Godínez was the only dramatist punished during his life by the Inquisition. According to Goldberg the public performance of *La Reyna Ester* helped bring his trial in 1624 in Seville as his play was performed in La Orche in the same year of its composition.

Godínez’s family suffered greatly at the hands of the Inquisition. He had an uncle who moved to North Africa to live openly as a Jew. Although ordained as a priest in 1613, Godínez would always grapple with his Jewish origins and public life as a member of the Catholic faith. One member of the family joining the Catholic religious order was a common practice among *converso* families in order to show allegiance to the church. This is also the case for the Carvajal family in Chap. 5, where Isabel and Leonor’s brother Balthasar became a priest. Godínez’s texts reflect this conflict surrounding the incorporation of both religious aspects into seventeenth-century Iberian life. *La Reyna Esther* continually presents these challenges in different ways throughout the text. This text reflects the omnipresence of the inquisition by incorporating an inquisitorial language: “sentensia, innobediens[i]a” (210) [judgment, disobedience].¹¹ Casting judgment and the sentencing of prisoners was one of the principal tasks of the Inquisition. It is very much a text that emerged from its environment; at the end of *La Reyna Ester*, Esther confesses as would a prisoner in the *Santo oficio*, saying “soy ebrea yo” (298). [I myself am a Hebrew]. The common charge for suspected false *conversos* was *judaizante* and this charge was written on the very first page of the Inquisitorial trial documents including the Carvajal sisters’ trials in Chap. 5. We will see how this work presents a major challenge to the early modern Iberian Catholic Church insofar as it celebrates Jewish piety and questions exclusionary norms of homogeneity. Unlike other Iberian texts of the moment, *La Reyna Ester* directly questions if religious

¹¹All the English translations of the two Godínez *comedias* are my own.

background should matter in judging the character of a person. Peasant Fileno says of Esther: ¿Qué inporta, si es un jodío?/Con ella me e de casar...” (208). [What does it matter if she is a Jew/I’m going to marry her].

Similarly, one of the princes, Egeo treats Mordechai in a positive manner that is not consistent with the biblical Persian court’s anti-Jewish sentiment: “Mardoqueo,/que es ho[m]bre noble au[n]que hebreo” (214). [Mordechai, who is a noble man even though he is Jewish]. Faint praise indeed; however, given the absolutist Inquisitorial context at time of writing and even the anti-Jewish sentiment within the text by the court itself, it is important to recognize how transgressive this statement is in allowing nobility or honor for a Jewish person. As we have seen, notions of honor for both women men defined social rules in early modern Iberia. Public displays of empire and nation were common whereby the Catholic Kings held processions of religion and state. The scene in which Jewish Mordechai is honored treats contemporary norms with irreverence in that the king asks Mordechai to wear “ynsignias del Rey” (271). [The insignia of the king]. Its incongruence in a post-expulsion Iberia is striking.

Other Golden Age tropes serve to challenge contemporary state-enforced notions of homogeneity. Barbara Fuchs shows us how Cervantine literature disrupts narratives of uniformity established by the union of church and state. She employs the critical category of passing as tool that complicates what it means to belong to Spain and shows how “passing strategically rehearses supposedly stable markers such as language, class, ‘race,’ ethnicity, religion, and nationality, thus complicating any possibility of categorical classification” (*Passing for Spain* 15). This strategy first presented itself in Lope’s *La hermosa Ester*, whereupon Esther passed as a member of the majority before revealing her Jewish identity. In Godínez’s retelling, we are presented with a cross-dressing female, a go-between, and other female figures that reimagine their roles in society. First we meet the cross-dressing Cassandra: “Mía a de ser la bitoria./Vn bestido de hombre os pido,/que agradar al Rey deseo” (228). [Victory must be mine./A man’s outfit I ask,/as I want to please the King]. In this text Cassandra refashions herself before meeting the king. Like the characters that Fuchs explores in the varied works of Cervantes, Godínez utilizes the tool of transvestism or to “dress across” as she notes is the etymological sense of the word. We witness in these

texts is “not only gender indeterminacy but a far more territorial crossover between self and other, underscoring the porosity of national boundaries and the fragility of an identity predicated on masculinity and blood purity” (Fuchs 4). These categories of identity are two major critical concerns of this study. This cross-dressing move is not found in any other early modern Esther biblical retellings that I have explored and serves to destabilize the gendered social order that is based upon religious and ethnic categories of exclusion. Cross-dressing female figures are common in texts of the early modern period including the historical figures that attracted literary attention *La Monja Alférez* (1592) [The Lieutenant Nun] or Eleno de Cespédes (1587).

Another literary type that serves to undermine contemporary norms is the figure of the *alcabueta* or the go-between, in this text exemplified by Pirro, the buffoon. He presents himself as an *alcabueta* and says: “y io su alcagüete soy” (217). [I am your go-between]. The appearance of the *alcabueta* figure makes us think of foundational texts including *Celestina* or *La Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (1499) [The Tragic-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea], and *La Lozana Andaluza* (1528) [The Lusty Andalusian Woman]. These texts present a context of ambiguous identities and *converso* protagonists where sexual identity is used to disrupt social hierarchies. Finally, these texts present social mobility as an option and a real possibility that undermines contemporary official policies. New Christians were officially restricted from government and church positions; however, as we well know many did take on roles that were not officially sanctioned. One example of the self-fashioning of individuals is found in the character of Hipólita. She is a peasant, yet she re-imagines herself as a candidate for the king when the call for young maidens is put out through the empire. Hipólita says regarding her transformation:

No soy Hipólita ya,
 Sino reyna, ¡Pardiés! Bueno,
 ¿yo abía de ser aldeana?
 ¡Ola!, ¿no estoy muy galana?
 ¡Mal año para Fileno!
 ¡Pardiés!, que estoy p[ar]a her

Mersedes. Bonita estoy.
 Esta ropa que me dio
 es bestido de muger,
 que parece que e bino
 para mí pintiparado. (228).

I am no longer Hipólita,
 But I am the queen, what luck! Well
 shouldn't I be a peasant?
 Look! Aren't I very elegant now?
 What a bad year for Fileno!
 Good luck! What I am for her
 favor. I look pretty.
 This clothing that she gave me
 is the outfit of a woman,
 that looks like it
 suits me a treat.

Finally upon gazing at herself in the mirror she says “No me conozco; ¿só yo?” (229). [I don't know myself, is this really me?]. The text comments that people are not always who they appear, and their identity is changeable and flexible. This is a common theme in Golden Age literature as we see in *Don Quijote*, in which farmer Sancho Panza re-imagines himself as a knight and the figure of *morisco* Ricote disguises himself as a Christian. This topic takes a prominent role in *La Monja Alférez*, in which Catalina de Erauso transforms her female gender identity into a masculine one and becomes a soldier, and in *Celestina*, in which Celestina is a master of trickery and deceit. In the character of Hipólita we see how a subject can fake and even alter one's identity by donning the correct clothing. Crucially, the text directly treats the idea of self-fashioning and individuals creating their own roles and relationships in a society that had rigid rules for its subjects. The Catholic Monarchs

utilized institutions including the Catholic Church and the Inquisition in order to position the role of society as justly reflecting and protecting an immutable natural order where their subject's identities were essential and unchangeable. Godínez shows these identities to be performances, implicitly questioning the categorizing as an ornament to power that seeks to justify itself. With Hípolita, Godínez points out that in the creation of an empire, albeit Persian or Spanish, many of the elements that stand at the heart of its public identity are nothing more than smoke and mirrors. This notion resonates with Godínez's personal biography in which he reinvents himself from a *converso* Jew to a priest, and as an author explores different aspects of *converso* life.

As *La Reyna Ester* plays with notions of gender identity, in some ways it totally disrupts gendered practices, however in other ways Godínez reflects his milieu in maintaining essential virtues deemed necessary for women in the early modern period. The foil characters including Cassandra and Hípolita serve to break gender norms, whereas Esther remains a model of piety. In the place of the biblical passage that outlines the twelve-month period in which the female figures undergo beauty and purification treatments before meeting the king, we are presented in this text with women who take control of their own transformations. Unlike other retellings in which the women are presented as silent figures before the king, in this retelling, the women that come before the king as a potential match defend their claim. For example, Hípolita says that she would be a good wife because: "sabrélo parir/después de los huebe meses" (230). [I know how to have a baby/after 9 months]. Princess Zares also presents herself as a match for the king says: "no me faltará alegría,/ni salud me faltará" (231). [I will not lack in happiness,/nor will my health ever fail me]. Godínez gives these characters the voice denied in Lope's more passive construction of the female figure. These candidates are not constructed as submissive figures waiting for their fate to be bestowed upon them, but instead they have agency, are dynamic, and actively attempt to shape their futures.

This retelling follows Lope's creative additions including the incorporation of country figures who reimagine themselves as royalty. In fact, *La Reyna Ester* gives more importance to these characters as the text begins in the countryside and outside of the royal sphere.¹² It is here that that

¹²The location contrasts with the initial presentation of the Esther story located in the center of Ahasueros' court in the tapestries.

king meets Esther, before her entry in court. After the initial scene in the country, the text shifts to the city and capital of Shushan where the court is located and concludes there as well. Again playing with the notion of appearance and reality, the king meets Esther in the country before she even recognizes him:

ESTER	¿El Rey sois? (¡Pobre de mí!)
REY	¿Del Rey huís? ¡Esperad! ¿Desprecias la voluntad de un Rey? ¿Qué [es] esto?
ESTER	Del Rey huiré yo más presto
REY	¿Por qué?
ESTER	Porque suele ser a medidav del poder su atrevimiento. (212–3)
ESTHER	Are you the king? (Poor me!)
KING	Are you running from the king? Wait! Do you spurn the will of the king? What is this?
ESTHER	From the king I flee even faster
KING	Why?
ESTHER	Because usually such boldness is borne from power.

There is a type of physical disguise that persists throughout this retelling. When subjects move beyond the contexts to which they are normally assigned, these disguises serve to hide their true identity. For example, Esther does not even recognize the king when she meets him outside of the courtly setting. Similarly, the two peasants, Cassandra, and Hipólita, reconstruct their identity once they move from the countryside to the court. As we have seen, self-fashioning is a major theme in this text and this includes figures who imagine themselves as potential romantic candidates for the king and queen even when their social status normally would prevent it.

Amidst the love triangles that populate the text is the main love story that is the king's search for a wife. Common to the other retellings is the calling for all virginal figures to appear before the king in a type of

beauty contest—an important manifestation of a material culture and a contemporary standard of virginity as a requirement for a maiden that goes unquestioned. The king is presented as having the right to look among all virgins in the realm and choose the one that he considers most beautiful and deserving. Esther stands out for the obedience and humility that she exhibits. She says “¿Yo reyna, siendo una hormiga?” (216). [I am queen, being a mere ant?]. As we will see, virtue through obedience is constructed as a crucial characteristic for the queen to uphold. This is common with contemporary ideology that women are essentially passive and decorous elements of society, this idea is upheld within the other texts that we have explored in chapter one and in Lope’s *La hermosa Ester*.

Obedience is a central theme in this text. Godínez is an author of his time—both in complicating nascent rigid ideals that are being propagandized, as well as in unflinchingly accepting some gendered discourse of compliance. Both the king and queen comment on the role of obedience between subjects, and especially that between a wife and her husband. Esther emerges as queen because her beauty and her virtues of obedience and humility. In selecting a wife, the king says: “porque ninguna merece/el título de mi esposa,/y más quien no me obedece” (201). [Because no one deserves/the title of being my wife,/especially one that does not obey me]. When Esther is selected, one of the first topics of conversation between them is a discussion about obedience. She says: “Yo sólo sé obedecer” (233) [And I will know how to obey], and he responds “Y sabré adorarte yo” (233) [I only know how to adore you]. Concluding this scene in which a wife is chosen, the king says: “¿Quién duda, Amán, que será el triunfo de la obediencia” (234). [Who doubts, Haman that this will be the triumph of obedience]. Esther embodies the different qualities determined appropriate for a woman and a queen. The prince Egeo concludes: “Al fin, el Rey escogió/mujer cuerda, virtuosa,/discreta, honesta y hermosa” (235). [Finally, the king chose/a sensible woman, virtuous/discrete, honest and beautiful]. Esther’s virtuous aspects are clearly highlighted and represent many of the contemporary values held for women in the early modern period.

The king presents his new queen to his subjects, and in doing so highlights the virtues that she upholds: “Reina os e dado, persas, cuyo zelo/será obediente, humilde, honesto y s[an] to./Yo, pues, felice yo, meresi

tanto” (237). [Persians, I have given you a Queen, whose zeal/will be obedient, humble, honest and saintly]. She is also presented as a good wife who takes care of the home, an important aspect as we have seen in the behavior manuals by Fray Luis de León and Juan Luis Vives that prescribe women’s roles in early modern Iberian society. We read in the text Esther says “La casa real, que a de ser/exemplo de las demás/en el rejimi-en]to y más/en la virtud que a de aber,/no a de consentir criados/que anden mal entretenidos (252). [The royal palace, which must be/an example for others/in its regimen and more,/in the virtue that must have/cannot coddle servants/who behave badly]. Esther upholds the royal palace as an example for the rest of the empire and in this construction she becomes the model of appropriate feminine behavior for the female subjects in the kingdom.

While one account of obedience emerges from Godínez’s retelling of Esther’s virtue, a more problematic notion of compliance is questioned in the antagonistic relationship between Haman and Mordechai. A major source of conflict in the text arises when Mordechai will not bow to Haman. Although this aspect is common to most texts, in this retelling, Godínez through the mouthpiece of Mordechai carefully outlines why bowing to Haman goes against his religion and effectively functions as an apologist for the Jewish religion, taking pains to justify his behavior. Mordechai won’t kneel as Haman says: “Nesio estás/Viejo; ¿por qué no te humillas/y me sirbes de rodillas/como todos los demás? (226). [You are foolish/Old man; why won’t you humble yourself/and go before me on your knees/like everyone else?]. Mordechai teaches a type of Jewish belief in the text when he responds: “No e de adorar como a Dios/a un hombre” (284). [I am not going to adore as I would God/a man]. This passage upholds that according to Jewish tradition only God receives this type of respect. Crucially, it is one of the aspects that Inquisitors would have found unacceptable. We read Mordechai’s response in the text:

Por ser soberbio, no esperes
 que humilde tengo de honrarte.
 No, Amán, no pienso adorarte
 de rodillas como quieres.
 Sólo a Dios se debe dar

essa adoración. Y así,
 pienso q[ue] dártela a ti
 es quitartela del altar.
 Y después de Dios, conviene
 venerar la real corona
 y al Rey; no por su persona,
 mas por el lugar que tiene.
 De modo que a solos dos
 da este honor la propia ley;
 a Dios, por sí mismo, al Rey,
 porque representa a Dios. (227)

For your arrogance, do not expect
 that I will humble myself and honor you.
 No, Haman, I have no intention to adore you
 on my knees as you want.
 Only to God should I give
 this devotion. And in this way,
 giving it to you
 means to take it away from the alter.
 And after God, one should only
 venerate the royal crown
 and the king; not for his person,
 but for the role that he has.
 In this way only two
 shall receive this honor according to the law;
 to God, for being himself, and the king,

because he represents God.

We see in this passage that the king is created in the image of God. It follows that the only person that Mordechai would bow to is the king as he is an extension of God himself. This conception of divine authority is compatible with Golden Age thought. It also reflects Godínez's personal struggle and potential resolve to remain a person who believes in Jewish traditions but also respects the king and his empire. In other words, this passage reflects individual reconciliation between two religious practices in early modern Spain. Mordechai further explains his position and tries to determine that most men not stand on equal footing as the king. He says: "De barro somos los dos,/que no eres Dios..." (281). [We both come from the dirt,/you are not God]. In acknowledging that both he and Haman come from the same origins, Mordechai in this passage erases some of the divisions that Haman has created between himself and the Jewish people of the Persian Empire. Furthering this idea in an Iberian context, Godínez argues against the separation of Old and New Christians in his own society.

Although Mordechai venerates the king wholeheartedly, peasant Hipólita questions if the king is really different from any other man? Interestingly, the voice of dissent comes from not only a woman but a peasant who occupies a known inferior social status within her society. In this way, she transgresses the barriers of gender and social status. This is not a mode of questioning that would have been appreciated by the king or the inquisition, church or state, it challenges the status quo and the contemporary gender hierarchies. In an aside she says: "¿Y es éste el Rey? No lo creo:/hombre es como los demás?" (229). [And Is this the king? I don't believe it/is he a man like everyone else?] By following Perry's suggestion that by achieving a feminist reading we locate the cracks in the patriarchal structure of a text. Here we clearly see a voice that casts doubt not only the masculine authority but the divine authority that was central to the reign of the early modern monarchy. In questioning the king's role as divine ruler she upsets the patriarchal notion that his power is absolute and ordained by God, and instead proposes a reordering of gender roles.

Esther's female-centered devotional practices are important aspects in this text. Her religiosity supports the idea that crypto-Judaism is a matriarchal religion whereas Judaism is patriarchal. As the primary figures

in crypto-Judaism, women reverse the patriarchal structure found in Judaism. They also use the tools that were at their command including their bodies and material objects in order to support their religious observance and practice. In *La Reyna Ester*, we are presented with an Esther that uses the material objects at her disposal in order to express her religious identity. We see this through the strategic use of clothing, fasting and spiritual books. In this text, unlike *La hermosa Ester*, we encounter an Esther that is observant and religious. She maintains an internal connection to God and has an intact faith and belief structure. This concept is part of the notion of the *Sephardic difference* that I develop and locate within the female figure. Religious piety is one aspect that allows new notions of self-fashioning to be inscribed upon Esther's body. Esther communicates directly with God, she says: "a ver en mis libros vengo/ la palabra que auéis dado en ella esperanza tengo, que es vuestra i nunca a faltado" (289). [I've come to see in my books/the word that you have given, in which I have hope, as you have never been in breach of it]. Esther is presented as a pious and devout person who invokes the figure of God throughout the text. This is a deviation from the original Hebrew biblical version in which God's name never appears. She says things like "¡Dios sea conmigo!" (211). [God be with me] and "Cavallero, andad con Dios" (211). [Gentleman, go with God]. Similarly, King Ahasueros invokes his belief in God: "Reina, mucho debo a Dios,/pues me a dado tal esposa" (238). [Queen, I owe a lot to God,/for he has given me such a wife]. Later Mordechai says in an aside: "¡Bendito el Dios de Israel!" (239). [Blessed be the God of Israel]. He also says: "Cielos, mil gracias os doy./Dios es justo" (239). [Heavens, a thousand thanks I give you./God is just]. It is telling that Esther, Ahasueros, and Mordechai pray to the same God because Godínez highlights in this text that the Jewish and Christian God is one and the same, and argues that the separation of the two traditions is arbitrary. However, it is Esther who emerges as the central religious figure in this text. She stands out the leader of a type of Jewish faith that must accommodate as *conversa*, staying below the radar until the end of the text whereupon she reveals her true religious identity and emerges as a heroine.

Unlike the Lope text, Esther gains virtue in this text in large part due to her model religious behavior and the fervor of her active religious practice. Esther's clothing is important—it is one of the material aspects that she uses to show her religious devotion. We see this aspect highlighted in the following dialogue between Mordechai and Esther:

MARDOQUEO ¿Qué trage es éste? Ya bes
que así te sueles bestir
pocas beses. ¿Piensas ir
al conbite de Sarés?

ESTER No fue aquesa mi intension
Sabrás, ia lo as bisto
que deste modo me visto
para entrar en orasión
A ser posible, quisiera
ir resplandeciente toda,
i entrar con ropa de boda
donde el esposo me espera
(Dios mío, adornadme bos.)

MARDOQUEO Pues, ¿por qué sueles mudar
el vestido para orar?

ESTER Porque boy ablar con Dios
Para este fin galas quiero;
que quitando a Dios enojos,
ante los diuinos ojos
pareser hermosa espero

MARDOQUEO ¡Santa aduertencia!
MORDECHAI What outfit is this? You hardly get
dressed up like this
Do you think about going
to Zares's party?

ESTHER That wasn't my intention
You know, you have already seen,
That this is the way I dress
in order to enter into prayer
If possible, I would like
to be totally radiant
and be in wedding clothes
where the husband is waiting for me
(Dear God, adorn me.)

MORDECHAI Well, why do you typically change
your clothing before praying?

ESTHER Because I am going to speak with God

For these reasons I want to be well dressed;
 because taking away any anger of God,
 before his divine eyes
 to look beautiful I hope
 Saintly warning!

MORDECHAI

We have seen the key role that material objects play for their transformative power in this text. In this instance, Esther uses her finest clothing before entering into prayer and communion with God. This passage clearly parallels how nuns in the Catholic tradition are considered the Brides of Christ or the chosen ones (Lavrin 5).¹³ Part of the ceremony in which they take their vows includes a spiritual marriage to Christ whereupon they arrive dressed in their wedding finery. Asunción Lavrin shows that in the life writings of these nuns, we see how they construct Jesus as a handsome and jealous husband (84). In this way, Esther's dressing for prayer shows a type of hybrid accommodation in the text, very familiar to *converso* and crypto-Jews. She remains a Jewish figure that also performs Christian practices, this is exactly how *conversos* lived and expressed their identity in early modern Spain. This hybrid accommodation expressed through material practices defines the *Sephardic difference* located in Esther's figure.

Fasting is another material practice that demonstrates Esther's devotion. She fasted with a group of other young women in order to determine how best to help the Jewish people in their plight in Persia.¹⁴ We read in the text: "Aora bien, yo determine/aiunar con mis donzellas;/q[ue] con el fauor diuino/an de hallar n[uestr]as querellas/algún dichoso camino" (286). [Well, I am determined/to fast with my maidens;/because with divine favor/will our disputes find/the right path]. This practice especially resonated with crypto-Jewish women throughout the Sephardic Diaspora. Gitlitz among other scholars have shown that fasting in the

¹³Asunción Lavrin shows that when a young girl between the ages of twelve and fourteen was on the threshold of maturity "families began to think about placing their girls 'en estado,' in the state of either marriage to a human husband or marriage to a divine one, Christ (19). We will also see in a moment how Esther is compared to the Virgin Mary, Lavrin shows that "by professing, nuns became not only the brides of God, but also the daughters of Mary" (95). This idea resonates with Esther's position in the text.

¹⁴Lavrin also shows that fasting was an element of religious practice that nuns used to control their bodily urges and demonstrate their vows chastity (85).

atmosphere of secrecy for crypto-Jews was widely used as devotional practice because it was not easily observable. It is a material practice that highlights observance through absence. Although the story of Esther presents both a fast and a feast, crypto-Jewish mobilization of the practice as suggested by this story exclusively included fasting. Esther continues in the text: “Porq[ue] alcancemos perdón,/haz q[ue] todo el pueblo aiune/y [que] a su Dios importune/con lágrimas y oración” (287). [In order for us to be granted forgiveness/make it that the whole nation fasts/and may all trouble God/with tears and prayers]. We will explore in detail how the practice of fasting manifests in Chap. 5 with the two crypto-Jewesses—Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal.

Esther’s prized religious texts express her material piety. Unlike the Esther figures, we have encountered previously, this Esther is presented as deeply religious and maintains the objects of her devotion with her. She says: “Quiero consultar un rato/los liuros de deuosión/con qui[e]n comunico y trato.” (289). [I would like to consult for a bit/my devotional books/with which I communicate and dialogue]. *Conversos* were not allowed to publicly practice Judaism, but many observed practices that were not publically visible. In this retelling, we see a reliance on these material, internal, invisible practices to advance the plot. As we have seen, both the fasting and the devotional books go towards this idea. Crucially, these “invisible” practices were regulated by the individual and not observable.

In environments that lacked rabbis and spiritual guidance, many *conversos* developed direct relationships with God. This idea is reflected in the text and Esther clearly has a personal relationship with God. She speaks to God directly saying: “Escuchad a quien os llama,/y acudid, eterno Dios,/a uestro pueblo que os ama,/que Ester umilde ante Uos/tierna lágrimas der[r]ama” (289). [Listen to who calls you/and come forth, eternal God,/to your people that loves you,/that humble Esther, before you,/tender tears fall]. She calls forth different biblical subjects including Daniel and David, the Greek Cumaean Sibyl, who presided over the Apollonian oracle, and the Angel Gabriel. These four figures have cameos when they appear in the play. They foretell the future of the Persian Empire and the Jewish people’s role within it. In her capacity to call upon these different figures, Esther takes on divine-like characteristics. This is another example of a creative and original addition because this type of intervention is found only within this particular retelling. Sibyl foretells the Virgin Mary’s role: “De una sobera birgen/-;prodixiosa nouedad!-/será la nueba progenie/que el çielo a la tierra

da” (292). [From a sovereign virgin/-prodigious novelty!-/will the new progeny come/to the earth from heaven]. Finally, the Angel Gabriel appears to the queen saying:

Ya escuchaste a Daniel, a Daud y a la Cumea;
 quiere Dios que su hijo sea de linaje de Israel.
 Sabrás, pues, que a una doncella
 que a de llamarçe María
 hará Dios su madre uella.
 Y yo, en allegándose el día,
 e de anunciárçelo a ella.
 No tocará a Uirgen tal el pecado original,
 que con la esposa del Rey
 no a de entenderse la ley,
 aunque se general. (293)

You already listened to Daniel, to David and the Cumaean woman;
 God wants your child to be from the lineage of Israel.
 You know, then, that a maiden
 that must be called Mary
 God will make her mother.
 And I, when that day arrives,
 will announce it to her.
 The virgin will be untouched by original sin,
 because being the king’s wife
 she doesn’t have to comply with the law,
 that the rest has to follow.

Esther’s exceptionality as queen allows her to be compared to the virgin. He continues to console Esther: “No tiene, pues, que temer/la muerte

tu pueblo, Ester,/que tú as de librarle della/siendo figura de aquella/
de quien Dios a de naçer” (293). [Thus, your people must not fear death
Esther,/as you will liberate them from it/as you are the figure/from
whom God must be born]. There is a mixture here of religious beliefs
both in the veneration of Old Testament figures including Daniel and
David, as well as the upholding of the New Testament, Virgin Mary
as the mother of God. By Gabriel calling Esther a prefiguration of the
Virgin, we see a plural understanding of both religious traditions. Esther
emerges as the savior of the Jewish people and as a subject that is deeply
shaped from a hybridized context of multiple religious faiths. This pas-
sage also reveals the intimate relationship that Esther had with God.
She, like Daniel and the Virgin Mary, is visited by the voice of God who
came down to speak and impart his message through Gabriel. Through
this direct communication with God without need for an intermediary,
Esther is raised up and singled out as a divine figure. Within the hier-
archical Catholic language, it is critical that Jewish Esther is elevated
among the gradations of man. The figures that she communicates with
reflect the multiple influences that contour her life, including both the
religious and the lay. Centrally, Crucially all of these figures would have
been well-known to Godínez and shaped his worldview.

The Virgin Mary takes on a pivotal role in this text. Consistent with
the growing Cult of Mary which increased in fervor and followers in
early modern Iberia,¹⁵ no longer are we presented with a hybrid virgin
figure replaceable by Esther, but instead a more traditional devotion in
the cult of Mary. Developed throughout the late medieval and refor-
mation period and would make its way to the New World, the Cult of
Mary took on many iterations including reverence to a *mestizo Virgen de
Guadalupe*. In the following passage, we see how Esther shows that her
belief in the Virgin Mary is unfaltering and are presented with her belief
system:

Esso mismo dirá dios;
que aunque a todos toque el mal

¹⁵Lavrin shows and the the Cult of Mary transformed worship on both sides of the Atlantic whereupon in New Spain the Virgin of Guadalupe took on a fundamental role in Catholic worship.

de la culpa original
 que fue nuestra perdición,
 su Madre será excepción
 de regla tan general. (273)

God will say the same thing;
 although everyone is touched by the evil
 of the original sin
 that was our downfall,
 his Mother will be the exception
 from the general rule.

Esther clearly explains original sin to the audience and shows that no mortal falls outside of its dominion. This text clearly reinforces Catholic belief and practice. Similarly, the king upholds his belief in the Cult of Mary: “¿Pero quién no considera/el infinito poder/de dios en vna muger,/que no es madre, y serlo espera? (277). [But who does not consider/the infinite power/of god in a woman,/who isn’t a mother, and hopes to become one?].

Conversos expressed their religiosity in hybrid ways. We will see how Esther performs a dual religious identity in the following passage:

ESTER	Disponga a su voluntad el Rey mi señor de mí
EGEO	Su esclava soi. Beisme aquí ¡Qué soberana humildad!
MARDOQUEO	¡Qué peregrina hermosura! Seas, gran Dios, glorificado; que aquí se a representado una sombra, una figura de quando bengan a dar aquella alegre enbaxada a la doncella sagrada en quien Dios a d’encarnar... (222)
ESTHER	Do your will

my lord the king
 I am your slave. Look at me here
 EGEO What sovereign humility!
 What sojourned beauty!
 MORDECHAI May you be, great God, glorified;
 for here it's been represented
 a shadow, a figure
 that when they come to give
 this happy envoy
 to the sacred maiden
 in whom God will embody

A few central aspects are highlighted in this fragment: first and foremost, Esther is constructed in religious terms that blend Judaism and Christianity—she is a *peregrina* or pilgrim. This is most often found in Christian texts especially including the Calixtino Codex that describes the *Camino de Santiago* or the Cult of Saint James which became popularized in the late medieval period. Like the revered saintly figure of Saint James who in his canonization takes on divine qualities, Esther is constructed as a “doncella sagrada” or sacred maiden in which God is embodied—just before we saw how Gabriel compared Esther to Mary saying that from her body a Hebrew king will be born. She is also constructed as God’s shadow. Esther emerges as a mystical figure whose physicality and practice can be compared to early modern *alumbradas* or spiritual women. They were religious women who often did not participate in a formal relationship with the church but imagined themselves as embodying Christ through their prayers. Paralleling the way that Esther expresses her religious devotion in the text, they were often persecuted as their observance was individual and unsupervised. We will see how in Chap. 5 the Carvajal women shared mystical religious expressions of faith.

Thus, far we have seen how in many ways Esther is presented as a Jewish savior and heroine. Within the text, she is compared to the Old Testament figure of Joseph. Like Joseph, she has a dream about her future and that of the larger Jewish population. Mordechai says: “En este sueño, sobrina,/ay misterio y no pequeño./Soñó Joseph, mas el sueño/fue revelación diuina” (216). [In this dream, niece/there is more than a little bit of mystery./Joseph dreamed, but his dream/was a divine revelation]. We read in the text:

En efeto, yo soñaba:
que el pueblo de Dios estaba
con una grande afligión.
Y era la pena de suerte
que me acuerdo que soñando
los bía a todos llorando
y condenados a muerte.
Todos a Dios se quegaban,
y en medio deste pesar,
viendo a los grandes llorar,
los niños también lloraban.
Entonses yo me ponía
en la diuina presencia
en oración, y clemensia
para su pueblo pedía;
que no se olvidase dél,
pues disen las prophesías
que a de naser el Mesias
del linaje de Israel.
Estabas tú sin anparo,
Yo con temor y reselo;
mas serenábase el sielo
y salía el sol más claro.
Pues luego, bolbiendo en mí,
me parece que sentada
en un trono y coronada

con gran magestad me bi.
 Soñé, en fin, que io era el medio,
 sin aberlo meresido,
 con que a su pueblo afligido
 daua Dios uida y remedio.
 Sesaua, pues, la aflicción,
 y era rey, un hijo mío.
 Mas a la fe, señor tío,
 que los sueños, sueños son. (215–6)

In effect, I dreamt
 that God's people
 were in great danger.
 And it was the sad luck
 that I remember that I dreamt
 that I saw everyone crying
 and condemned to death.
 They all complained to God
 and in the middle of this,
 I saw the elderly cry,
 and children also cried.
 Then I put myself
 in the divine presence
 in prayer, and clemency
 I asked for his people;
 that he would not forget them.
 Because the prophecies say

That the Messiah will be born
 From the lineage of Israel.
 You were without refuge,
 And I with fear and doubt;
 but the heavens became calm
 and the sun came out.
 And then, returning to myself,
 I think I saw myself
 Sitting on a throne and crowned
 with great majesty.
 I dreamt, ultimately, that I was in the middle,
 without deserving it,
 with his afflicted people
 gave God life and a remedy.
 The affliction, then, ended,
 and a child of mine became king.
 But faith, dear uncle,
 because dreams, are dreams.

In her dream, Esther sees the future not only of the Persian Empire, but the future of the Jewish people, and her own individual role as mother of the future king. Esther's son will not only be king but will be the messiah. We can say that in this text, Esther is a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, a less sympathetic interpretation, would read that Esther and her unborn son replace the virgin and Jesus altogether—a very heretical posture indeed.

An important element of *La Reyna Ester* is the call to retell and reinterpret. As we have seen, Esther's dream has multiple possible interpretations reminding us of Naomi Siedman's work with the multiple plotments of a text. In addition to the dream sequence that Esther

called to interpret, Godínez presents another dream sequence for the King Ahasueros. The king calls upon others to help interpret and analyze his dreams. Crucially, the dreams of both Esther and Ahasueros focus on a topic that would have been close to the heart of many *converso* subjects—the existence and survival of the Jewish people. The king dreams of a prophecy that would destroy his empire: “El rey pide un libro que cuente la historia” (268). [The king asks for a book that tells the story]. He calls upon different wise people including an Egyptian, a Greek, Mordechai and Haman to explain different possible interpretations from their unique perspectives. Haman constructs the potential downfall of Ahasueros’s empire as the Jews’ fault and thus creates the pretext to kill the Jewish people. Mordechai interprets that the Persian Empire will continue for another couple of generations under its current monarchy. What stands out are the different possible interpretations and the very Jewish sounding idea that by analyzing the same text from different perspectives the conclusion changes. This parallels classical Jewish scholarship which primarily consists of a method defined by the in-depth critical study and close reading of passages that invites multiple interpretations, debate, and dialogue among scholars.¹⁶

The prophecy ends with the following line: “nacerá el hijo de la hebrea” (256) [the son of the Hebrew woman will be born] with the understanding that this son will become king. Haman’s response shows his total disregard for the Jewish people: “Es un judío;/no ay q[ue] hazer casso destes” (258). [He is a Jew;/you must not listen to these people]. The Greek scholar says “Esso no acabo de interpreter” (259). [This I cannot interpret], like the Egyptian who says “Esso no alaço” (257) [That I don’t understand]. Esther in an aside says “¿Si a de ser hijo mío por bentura/el hijo de la hebrea? El Rey no sabe/que soy desta nación” (257). [If it’s true that by fortune he will be my son/the child of the Hebrew woman? The king doesn’t know/that I am from that nation]. Finally, Mordechai responds also in an aside: “¡El hijo de la hebrea/bien lo dixera yo! ¿Qué duda tiene?/Hijo será de Ester” (259). [The son of the Hebrew woman/well I knew it What doubt is there?/The child will be Esther’s]. Whereas the other wise men are in the dark, both Esther and Mordechai are shown to have superior knowledge and be able to correctly interpret the future of the empire.

¹⁶Classical Jewish scholarship refers to the study of both the bible and the Talmud. This type of discussion based learning in pairs is known as chavrusa learning (Tedmon v).

Although no child is born in this story, the child stands as a metaphor for the survival of the Jewish people. In all other versions, Esther is presented not as a mother but as a wife and a savior of the Jewish people; in this text, she strikingly parallels the centrality of the Virgin Mary for Catholic followers. Within Catholic ideology, it is a truly irreverent move to equate the Virgin Mary with a Jewish subject. These multiple interpretations also demonstrate the hybrid context in that which Godínez developed. He recognizes the importance of the Virgin Mother figure in the Catholic religion as would the public that saw the public presentation of his play. Crucially, in this act of retelling, interpreting, and analyzing, we witness the ability to explain the same event in different ways. Unlike contemporary policies of homogeneity and exclusion, Godínez presents the multiplicity of thought and perspectives as a positive element in his society.

The story ends with a banquet in which Haman is invited to dine with the king and queen and ultimately is called out for the plan he is about to wreck on the Jewish people. Esther says:

Amán, por odio que tiene
a los hebreos, señor,
y a mi tío especialmente,
porque siempre que pasaba
la adoración no le daba
que es para Dios solamente,
por bengarce de él y dellos,
ese consejo te dio;
mas en el laço cayó
que tenía para ellos.
Dale, s[eñ]or, el castigo
que merese su malicia.
Yo me quejo; hasme justicia.
Muera Amán, nuestro enemigo.

Destrúyele, Rey. Acaba
 con su bida su traición,
 que no es digno de perdón
 el que a nadie perdonaba. (305)

Haman, for the hate that he holds
 for the Hebrews, sir,
 and especially for my uncle,
 because whenever he passed by
 he would not give the adoration
 that he reserved only for God,
 and to take revenge on him and on them,
 he gave you this advice;
 but he fell in the trap
 that he had created for them.
 Give him, sir, the punishment
 that he deserves for his wickedness.

I complain; do me justice.

May Haman, our enemy, die.

Destroy him, King. End

with his life, his traitorous ways,
 the one who would not forgive anyone
 is not worthy of forgiveness.

Esther avenges the plot brought against the Jewish people. Because she has access to the king and has shown herself to be a worthy queen, Esther emerges victorious. The norms of patriarchy and empire are broken by a female figure that stands up for the good of her people. Haman is called out as a traitor to the empire and the king says: “Y notad lo

que aquí passa,/que es exemplo en que se mira/que quando ar[r]loga la flecha/la pasión, vuelve derecha/contra el mismo que la tira” (307). [And look at what happens here,/that is an example for all those who see/when an arrow is aimed/passion, will turn straight/against the same one who sent it]. The king continues: “En dos balancas están/sus dos suertes, y así beo/que ha subido Mardoqueo/todo lo que bajó Amán./En fin, ya está perdonado/el pueblo hebreo” (308). [In these two balancas are/your two lucks, and as I see it/Mordechai has risen,/as much as Haman has fallen./To conclude, the Jewish people have already/been pardoned]. Fortunes, all political, religious, and personal are subject to change. There is a type of accommodation to the idea that fate is changeable and depends on the actors who wield power.

La Reyna Ester reflects the truly hybrid atmosphere in which the author was immersed and within which the text was created. As said earlier, this story was used as evidence against Godínez in his Inquisition trial. We have seen throughout this retelling that Godínez supports a Jewish perspective in conjunction with Catholic faith practices. This text explores how the concept of purity and honor manifest in Iberian society while fleshing out the multiplicity of subjectivity versus objective truth. We will see in the revisionist version of the text *Amán y Mardoqueo* how Godínez retold his first text to conform to the official and homogenizing policies of state.

ESTHER AMONG CONVERSOS: *COMEDIA FAMOSA* *DE AMÁN Y MARDOQUEO*

Godínez’s second text *Comedia Famosa de Amán y Mardoqueo*, also known as *La Horca para su dueño*, presents a revision of many of the heretical aspects presented in *La Reyna Ester*. *Amán y Mardoqueo* parallels the two *autos sacramentales* in their orthodox obedience to the Catholic regime. In this text, we witness another example of the Christianization of the biblical Esther tale. Instead of celebrating the Jewish queen, *Amán y Mardoqueo* instead refocuses on two masculine characters and the ultimate triumph of a male figure that proves his loyalty to the empire and the king. The hybrid context that was clearly celebrated and upheld in *La Reyna Ester* disappears in this retelling. Out of all the Esther tales this work was most clearly shaped by the Inquisition and by someone who faced punishment and “re-education” at its hands.

The language used throughout *Amán y Mardoqueo* reflects this atmosphere of fear and punishment. Clearly reinforcing the context of obedience in which the story emerged, here the obedience is not found in marital bliss nor in gender norms, but instead is presented as the appropriate relationship that subjects in an empire should have with their nation and its ruler.

The text begins by recalling the reasons for which Vashti was expelled—disobedience, we read in the text: “no quiso obedecer” (221). [She did not want to obey]. As in *La Reyna Ester*, the king in this retelling is presented as a melancholy figure because he is without a queen. It quickly justifies why the queen was banished and is not deserving of the honor of her former role. Haman further details Vashti’s disobedience: “Vastí, soberuia beldad,/es dio en recíproca vnión,/no fruto de bendición,/sino ojos de vanidad” (226). [Vashti, magnificent beauty,/in this reciprocal union you were given,/not fruits of blessings,/but eyes of vanity]. In fact, the text spends more time initially discussing the wrongdoings of Vashti than presenting Esther as a potential queen. This parallels the way that in the tapestries, “Esther and Ahasueros,” Esther is completely absent from the first panel. Similarly, in the *autos sacramentales* neither *auto* is specifically dedicated to Esther, but instead dedicated to a subject who does not obey and respect the empire sufficiently. Linking these retellings, the concept of punishment is carefully highlighted. At the same time, the idea of a close bond between masculine friends (the king and Haman) is common to both of Godínez’s texts. In fact in this retelling, male friendship takes the place of any interaction and communication between Vashti and the king.

Amán y Mardoqueo, like *La Reyna Ester*, also begins in the countryside outside of the capital setting. Although the tapestries and *autos sacramentales* commence with a banquet demonstrating the wealth of the empire, here the banquet is replaced by a conversation between the king and Haman. The reason that Mordechai and Esther do not live in the capital of Susa is carefully explained in the beginning by the peasant Alfaxad, who says that the Hebrew King Saul killed one of Haman’s ancestors and for that reason, Haman harbors such resentment towards the Jewish people: “por esta muerte/o esta enemistad,/tiene Amán gran pena/con los de Iudá;/por esso no viue/en esta ciudad,/corte del rey [A]suero,/que llaman Susán,/Mardoqueo” (229). [For this death/or this lack of friendship,/Haman has a lot of

bitterness/with those of Judah;/and for that reason Mordechai does not live/in this city, Ahasueros' court,/that they call Shushan]. Right from the outset, this text insists upon the inferior role that the Jewish people play within the Persian and by extension the Iberian Empire. It is clear that Jews do not live in the city because they are not welcome in the space inhabited by the court. Furthermore, it justifies Haman's hatred as grounded on an initial evil perpetuated by the Jews, making him more sympathetic.

This retelling clearly shows that the Jewish people are treated as inferior due to their religious identity. Paralleling the purity of blood statutes that dominated official policy in the early modern Iberian empire, the text develops a category that combines religious and ethnic identities. As we know, these categories ascribed positive characteristics with a Christian ancestry and negative and impure characteristics with a Jewish or Muslim past. In the following passage, we see how Esther's Jewish heritage is looked down upon by the princess Zarés:

¿tú, quién eres?
 ¿qué corona, qué laurel,
 ¿qué timbre ay en tu linaje?
 Antes nos das a entender,
 Como allá entre los hebreos
 Deciende Melquisedech,
 Que eres su genealogía. (256)

Who are you?
 what crown, what laurel,
 what mark is there of your lineage?
 Before you will have to explain to us,
 How between the Hebrews
 Melchizedek is descended,
 How you are of his genealogy.

This approximates the Iberian society in which Godínez lived, in which the purity of blood policies, created the categories of Old and New Christians. Zarés specifically connects religious identity to ethnic identity as was standard in early modern Iberia in the statement: “Que eres su genealogía [You are of his genealogy]. Similarly, Haman looks down upon Mordechai for not bowing to him and links it to his background:

¿Es tu vanidad por dicha,
 porque de Abrahán procedes,
 muypreciado de israelita?
 Pues di, bárbaro, ¿no es cierto
 que las mismas profecías,
 aunque ves escriuir hombres
 dirás que es dios quien las dicta,
 diziéndose culpa a pena,
 aunque ambas son sin medida
 de vn dios vengado, os anuncia
 la mas seuera justica? (262–3)

Is your vanity peaked,
 because you come from Abraham,
 a very valued Israeli?
 Well say, barbarian, isn't it true
 that the same prophesies,
 are dictated by God
 even though you see men write them,
 speaking of guilt and punishment of death,
 although both are without measure
 from an avenged God, who will announce
 the severest justice?

Although Mordechai's choice to not bow to Haman is found in the biblical version of the story and is common throughout all the retellings, the way in which this scene plays out is very revealing. In *La Reyna Ester*, this passage functions as a defense of Judaism, whereas in *Amán y Mardoqueo*, this scene as explained by Haman clearly echoes the policies of exclusion and expulsion that were waged upon the Jewish people in early modern Spain. In the text, Haman wants to see the Jewish people removed from the Persian Empire: "¿Luego esta nación maldita/en el reinado de Asuero/no se ha de ver exteing[u]ida?" (265). [Therefore won't this damned nation/in the kingdom of Ahasueros/be extinguished].

This text upholds Esther as a religious figure, just as she was presented in *La Reyna Ester*. However in this text, Esther's religious practice takes on a much more Christian approach: "Artífice diuino,/que tus obras escriues/con dorados caracteres de estrellas" (233). [Divine maker,/that your own work you write/with golden characters from the stars]. The golden characters from the stars reminds of us the nativity scene that led the magi to Bethlehem. She also describes the type of social withdrawal that she undertakes in order to pray:

Yo quiero en este retiro
 passar las noches y días
 meditando profecías
 cuyo cumplimiento admiro
 abreuando en las semanas
 de Daniel, que en nuestra edad
 profetiço y la verdad
 nos loas explica tan llanas;
 por todas hecha la cuenta,
 según la reuelación,
 los años que montan son
 quatrocientos y nouenta. (235)

I want to pass the
 the nights and days of this retreat
 meditating prophesies
 whose achievement I admire,
 abbreviating in the weeks
 of Daniel, that in our age
 I foresee; prophecy and the truth
 explains our praises so simply:
 by all who keep accounts,
 according to the revelation,
 that the years are getting to be
 four hundred and ninety.

This type of withdrawal parallels the way that cloistered nuns withdraw themselves from the daily practices of everyday life in order to spiritually connect with their faith—a common practice for women who chose the religious life over marital life in early modern Spain. Esther concludes this passage saying: “¡O Virgen! ¿Quién mereciera/ser sombra tuya siguiera?” (236). [O Virgin! Who deserves/to even be your shadow?]. Whereas in *La Reyna Ester*, Esther is compared as an equal or even a replacement of the virgin, in this retelling, Esther carefully shows that in any type of comparison between the two she could not measure up. The Virgin as the mother of God is a more important figure than she could ever aspire to be. Esther says upon becoming chosen to be queen: “De Dios, no de mí, concierto/toda esta victoria en mí,/pero si dios vence en mí,/vença yo, por que dios vença” (248). [Of God, not of me, agrees/all this victory in me,/but if God takes over me,/take over I will, in order for God to win]. Again, Esther does not embody the heroic tone that she upholds in the first text, she instead attributes all of her virtues to a God that is merciful and powerful.

Other Catholic images and practices are found throughout the text. For example, the stage directions present that before Esther engages in prayer, she takes on a Catholic posture: “Aparece a vn lado del tablado

una capilla con vn astral y missal, hincada de rodillas Ester, como eleuada. Descubre la cortina Mardoqueo y Egeo hinca la rodilla a modo de la salutación del Angel” (245). [On one side of the stage there is a chapel, and with a pointer and a book, bowed to the knees was Esther, almost elevated. Mordechai opens the curtain and Egeo is bowed at the knee as if to greet the Angel]. These directions would clearly resonate with an audience who performed a similar type of observance in their everyday religious practice. Even Mordechai, the Jewish figure par excellence in this story, discusses the role of Christ in the following passage:

De manera que contando
 desde Asuero hasta los días
 que falta el cetro a los tribus
 de Iudá, que se bendigan
 en Christo todas las gentes
 que aclamen sus ierarquíias
 a dios nacido, que crezca,
 que opuestos a su dotrina
 sacrílegos le calumien,
 obstinados le persigan,
 quando en su muerte enlutado,
 perdiéndose el sol de vista... (264)

In that way telling,
 From Ahasueros until today,
 that the tribes of Judah lacked the scepter,
 that may all the people who acclaim
 their hierarchies to God born be blessed in
 Christ, may he grow,

may those sacrilegious opposed to
 his doctrine defame him,
 the obstinate persecute him,
 when he is mournful in his death,
 as the sun disappears from our sight...

In this passage, Mordechai recognizes Christ's role in the Persian Empire and his own role as a subject within this Christianized Iberian Empire. This passage works to convince subjects to convert faithfully: "que se bendigan/en Christo todas las gentes/que aclamen sus ierarquías", and promises those who do not all types of hardships: "sacrílegos le calumien/obstinados le persigan." This is a different type of figure than we saw in the *La Reyna Ester* who clearly upheld Jewish ideology. Like the story, Mordechai himself has been transformed into a faithful convert. Within early modern Iberian society, there was a generalized fear of false converts and those who secretly practiced Judaism even after conversion, this text clearly celebrates those true converts and believers in the Law of Christ.

In *La Reyna Ester*, we saw an apology of the Jewish religion and hybrid worship; here in this text, we are presented with a clear defense of the early modern monarchy. Esther further outlines how the rule of state is inseparably linked to the religious rule of the church. She shows how the king and God are united to perform one function: "Si el cuerpo místico el reino,/¿no es el corazón, de quien/mana ese cuerpo la vida/con quien se conserua, el rey?" (253). [If the mystical body is the kingdom,/isn't it the heart, of whom/life flows/and with whom it is preserved, the king?]. The king fulfills on earth what God started in heaven: that is upholding and defending a Christian empire.

Although Esther does not replace the Virgin in this text, her role as queen does come from a divine right that is ascribed to her from her husband the king. Ahasueros in the following passage constructs Esther as a worthy queen in his empire. The passage closely parallels Lope's construction of a woman that supersedes gendered restrictions due to her exceptional beauty. In this retelling, Godínez bases Esther's beauty upon the daily rising of the sun:

bella entre todas, Ester,
 si tu hermosura es diuna,
 eterna será también.
 Como el sol eres sin duda,
 porque el sol, diuina Ester,
 aunque nace cada día,
 tiene inmortal la niñez:
 y así verás en su aspecto...
 Luego si es sol tu hermosura,
 naturalmente ha de ser
 con nueva luz cada día,
 o el mismo sol cada vez. (251-2)

beautiful among all others, Esther,
 if your beauty is divine,
 it will be also be eternal.
 You are like the sun without doubt
 Because the sun, divine Esther,
 Although it is born each day,
 has an immortal childhood;
 and thus you will see in his appearance...
 Therefore if your beauty is like the sun,
 it naturally must will be
 with the new light each day,
 or the same sun each time.

Her divinity is based upon her role in the natural order. Esther responds with the utmost humility. Crucially, she employs Catholic confessional language in order to describe her religious identity to the king:

Gran señor, con mi humildad,
 ¿qué puedo yo responder?
 Hechura vuestra, aunque indigna,
 siempre me confessaré.
 El rey, de Dios es retrato,
 y a Dios se ha de parecer:
 Dios amó el alma, y no dudo,
 pues vos amasteis a Ester,
 se le dio mérito a ella,
 que vos a mí me la deis. (252)

Great lord, with my humility,
 How can I respond?
 I am your creation, although unworthy,
 I will always confess.
 The king, is God's portrait,
 and he must be made in God's image:
 God loved his soul, and I don't doubt,
 since you loved Esther,
 that he has given merit to her,
 that you have given to me.

Esther confesses that she is only worthy as queen insofar as she has been chosen by the king. The king was created in God's image, and she, like all women are further removed from a divine presence. This interpretation reveals contemporary notions regarding the place of women in the early modern Iberia. There is not even the slightest hint of a challenge to gender norms as found in *La Reyna Ester*. Here the binary gender roles are distinctly reinforced in which a hierarchy places men ahead and above women, and closer to God.

Esther also carefully outlines her individual role and the role of women in general in this schema. She says upholding the traditional gender division: “a parte más flaca,/se ha inclinado a la muger” (253). [The weaker part,/has been assigned to the woman]. This language of humility has been employed as a rhetorical strategy by other contemporary religious figures including Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in New Spain and Santa Teresa in Iberia. King Ahasueros clearly defines how he understands his role as a divine right: “Dios, y el rey, que vnirese suelen,/vno con la ley diuina,/y otro con la humana ley;/porque han de formar los dos/el cuerpo natural dios,/y el cuerpo místico el rey” (279). [God, and the king, normally come together,/one is the divine law,/and the other the human law;/because the two together form/the natural body of God,/and the mystical body of the king]. The insistence on a king that is ordained by God is fundamental in this retelling. Godínez carefully upholds a nation in which the physical body of rule is the king and he is ordained by the spiritual God. He uses the biblical story of Esther to legitimize the early modern Spanish Empire and show that it was a fundamental part of the divine order. It also reflects the concept of society as a unified body in which heterogeneity is a disease.

The text continues to flesh out how rule is divided into the 2 categories of favor and punishment: “Yo sigo/opinión particular:/los dos polos del reinar/son el premio, y el castigo” (280). [I follow/a particular opinion:/that the two poles of ruling/are both the prize and the punishment]. This dual notion of rule reflects the idea of a paternalistic state that is constantly evaluating subjects in order to ascertain who deserves special favors from the king and who deserves punishment for disobedience. This is also an aspect that is highlighted from the start of the text when Vashti is punished and Esther is favored.

Although the female characters reveal this dual notion of rule (punishment and reward), his masculine relationship between Haman and Mordechai presents the idea of favor and punishment most clearly. As previously noted, Esther’s role in this retelling is diminished. Haman from the outset takes on a lot of power, and Mordechai replaces Esther as the more pious and religious figure further stripping her of religious agency. This characteristic is constructed as essential to her nature and not achieved through practice. In other words it is what Esther is and not what she does. We read in the following passage how it is Mordechai who communicates with God by donning penitential clothing: “de vn saco el cuerpo vestido,/y ceniza en la cabeça, ya en dios la piedad

empieza,/pues penitente la pido./Fuego al pesar, rabia ha sido,/ceniza es ya, porque ciego/de loorar se apague luego” (288). [His body is dressed with a sack,/with ashes on his head, with God piety begins,/as I ask her to be penitent./Fire to the burden, it has been/ashes are already, so that later/he may turn blind from prayer]. In this version, Mordechai takes Esther’s place as a supremely devotional figure. The use of the sack-cloth is consistent among all retellings and among the biblical original, but this Catholic confessional retelling insists upon the role of penitential garb for prayer rather than in mourning for his people. Although Mordechai is one of the central characters in the original biblical narrative and the subsequent Castilian retellings, in this text, his role is heightened. Mordechai reasons: “Se que es mudable la suerte,/que va adelenta la muerte,/y que yo la temo, y la sigo./Siempre la fortuna tuue/por vna reuda de noria,/donde es nuestra vanagloria/arcaduz que baxa, y sube” (289). [I know that luck is changeable,/that it comes before death,/that I fear it, and I follow it./I always had considered fortune/as a mill wheel,/where our conceit is/a path that falls, and rises].

Where Haman is punished for giving himself too much power and lacking in humility, Mordechai is favored because he shows obedience to the king and to his empire. This text concludes with Mordechai receiving the ring that originally went to Haman: “En lugar de Amán le doy/el sello real, por que él propio,/contra los edictos dados/puede así despachar otros” (304). [In Haman’s place I give him/the royal ring, because he alone/against the edicts that were given/can take care of others]. It is key that in *Amán and Mardoqueo*, a modified, Christianized Mordechai has the ring, an element of material culture that maintains the contemporary social order. This ring is also an important aspect of many of the retellings; as we have seen in chapter two, in the third panel of the tapestries, the exchange of ring between the king and Mordechai demonstrates confidence and trust. Esther has the last word: “Supla el discreto senado/las faltas. Que desde modo/tendrá Amán, y Mardoqueo/fin, y principio dichoso” (304). [May the discreet senate make up for/their crimes. Because in that way/Haman and Mordechai will have,/an end, and a joyful beginning].

In reading *Amán y Mardoqueo* alongside *La Reyna Ester*, we are able to see the clear differences between these two texts. I can only credit these modifications to the intercession of the inquisitors and the trial that Godínez confronted. I am not aware of any other retellings that treat the same source material that were written by a *converso* on either side

of his Inquisitorial trial. It is fascinating to be presented with a case study that not only demonstrates the hybrid and tension filled world of a *converso* priest, but also reflect what happens to him after his “re-education.” The origins of *Amán y Mardoqueo* are not known, that is if Godínez was instructed to re-write his text in order to appeal to the inquisitors’ morality upon his release, or if he was directly asked to take on such a task. However, what stands out, alongside with the tremendous pressure this one individual faced in a world that seemed to constantly change under his feet, is the flexibility that is celebrated in the Book of Esther. As we saw in the case of Lope de Vega, perhaps the biblical exceptionalism of its origins allowed this story to be told within Iberia and performed for the masses without immediately raising suspicions. We do know that Godínez eventually was brought up on inquisitorial charges in part for the creation of the heterodox retelling of *La Reyna Ester*.

We will see in the next two chapters how this story took on different characteristics in the diaspora for *conversos* who were able to return to openly practicing Judaism in Amsterdam, and for crypto-Jews, who in New Spain upheld Esther as a heroine and a figure that promised deliverance. As one of the only biblical stories dedicated to a woman, Esther took on a heightened role for the crypto-Jews of New Spain. These women became the unofficial rabbis of a new matriarchal religion and looked for other female figures that resonated with their daily and public Catholic practices. Esther is very relatable—she is a figure that inherently moves between categories, as a woman she must adhere to contemporary gender norms but also rises above them in her status as queen. She is an individual that even while silent resists patriarchal and religious norms of the complex social and political environments that she inhabits.

In the exploration of the Esther story through three *comedias* in this chapter, both criticism of the old social order and resistance to change come to light. As Cascardi shows: “through *comedia* Spanish society was able to simultaneously to confront and to resist that transformation” that was occurring elsewhere in early modern Europe (21). In many ways, the new is sacrificed for the hierarchical values of the old social order leaving little room for the “autonomy of the self” (21) as we have seen in the revisionist version of *Amán y Mardoqueo*.

In the next chapter, we move to the long poem *Poema de la Reyna Ester* written by Portuguese *converso* João Pinto Delgado in the Sephardic Diaspora and crucially outside the physical boundaries of Iberia. We are presented with a confrontation between Spain and

northern Europe negotiated by a member of the Sephardic Diaspora. Delgado writes in Northern Europe but within many conventions of Golden Age Spanish literature and for the first time are presented with an author grappling with both influences. He employs the Esther figure to speak both to notions of individual identity and collective identity within a strong community of believers. Delgado's Sephardic and Iberian identity remained a fundamental aspect of his creation, and a type of borderless nation was formed in the literary works that connected him and others in the diaspora to the Iberian homeland. It is once again the figure of Esther that allows for the exploration of competing notions of identity, tradition and practice.

Esther in the Portuguese Nation

In *Poema de la Reyna Ester* (1627), we encounter a different representation of the Sephardic Diaspora, as well as a view of Iberia from the outside. As the story of Esther is removed from Iberia and retold within the Portuguese community in the diaspora, this retelling betrays a longing for a homeland lost. It highlights the trials encountered in the diaspora by Iberian Jewish *conversos*. Author João Pinto Delgado was a *converso* from Portugal who reconnected with the Jewish faith in Amsterdam before moving to France and ultimately returning to Amsterdam. In France, he became the head figure of the Sephardic community of Rouen (Bodian 1997, 143). His long poem *Poema de la Reyna Ester* reflects a very different attitude towards the Esther story than that found in the *autos sacramentales* or *Amán y Mardoqueo* by Felipe Godínez. It most closely parallels Godínez's sentiments before his reduction by the Inquisition. Delgado's text was written by a returning Jew in the diaspora, a New Jew according to Yosef Kaplan and Daniel Swetschinski, outside the reach of the Inquisition and Iberian persecution. Most importantly, as it is written in the context of the diaspora and transmits ideas of loss and fear, it also provides hope and inspiration in the figure of Esther.

In accord with David R. Slavitt, Delgado's poem "is also an extended metaphor, for its account of suffering and injustice followed by a magnificent vengeance applies to the Jews' experience in Spain with the Inquisition almost as well as it does to its ostensible subject, their peril and deliverance in Persia under Xerxes (Ahasueros)" (xi). This poem

celebrates the Jewish faith and the Jewish people, and especially the idea of overcoming adversity and flourishing in a new context. Like other texts composed in the larger Sephardic Diaspora, Delgado's poem carefully upholds and celebrates Esther as a heroine and savior of the Jewish people.¹

Written in sextets with a rhyme scheme ABABCC, the poem is composed of 1902 hendecasyllabic (eleven syllable) lines. This text was published in book form alongside *Lamentaciones del propheta Ieremias* [Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah] and *Historia de Rut y varias poesías* [History of Ruth and Other Poems]. Significantly, Delgado published together his poems dedicated to the only two biblical books that are written about women: Esther and Ruth. All texts included in this collection echo the bittersweet condition of searching for a home in exile. To the reader Delgado writes “porque milagros, lagrimas para comover el cielo a piedad” (a3). [Because miracles, tears which move the heavens to piety]. He accesses what he calls “sacred” and “mysterious” texts in order to connect with his fellow *conversos* in the diaspora and ask the heavens for aid. Many Iberian *conversos* maintained strong biblical connections and saw heightened importance in figures like Esther who were not as primary in normative Judaism, but in their context came to have a defining role. Delgado writes in the beginning of the poem: “Será trompeta de tu voz mi pluma” (1). [So that your voice may sound in me]. He is writing to dispel a *converso* perspective throughout the diaspora and to actively connect with subjects who, like him, have lost their homeland and sought the possibilities of living and returning to Judaism abroad. The audience that Delgado writes for in this text is the diasporic group with which he identifies. Other authors of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam wrote for *conversos* who returned to rabbinic Judaism outside of Iberia including Menassah Ben Israel author of *Esperanza de Israel* (1650). [The Hope of Israel]. Delgado would have read the *Ferrara Siddur* (1552), published in Ferrara, Italy and Samuel Usque's

¹Esther is commonly upheld as the patron saint for *conversos* and as a central figure for crypto-Jewish worship (Gitlitz 378). To support this assertion Gitlitz refers to Martin Cohen (1973) and Manuel Costa Fontes (1989), the latter describes the hanging of the image of the “Holy Queen Esther” in the homes of New Christians in Belmonte, Portugal until fairly recently (378). We will discuss this idea in detail in Chap. 5 through the case study of the Inquisitorial manuscripts of Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal.

Portuguese language: *Consolaçam as Tribulaçoens de Israel* (1553) [Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel] published both in Ferrara and Amsterdam. These texts were written specifically for the Jewish exiles in the diaspora, who were looking to reconnect with their faith. Usque specifically addresses his audience in the prologue stating that “the order and purpose of the book [is for] the gentlemen of the diaspora of Portugal” (38).

The *Poema de la Reyna Ester* highlights what the Sephardic community looks like in the diaspora. At the same time, it helps to illustrate the overlapping notions of national identity and homeland that are in play for Iberian *conversos*. For all Jewish people, Jerusalem and Israel are constructed as the homeland. Upon the destruction of the first temple, the diaspora functions as a defining aspect of Jewish identity. The poem directly references the destruction of the temple drawing a parallel between the biblical diaspora that affected Esther’s people, and the seventeenth-century *converso* population. We read in the poem: “Y en las ruinas de su Templo santo/Entre la muerte sepultó su llanto” (44) [But here we are, far from the sacred Wall/that yet stands of the Temple] (45).² Diaspora shapes the lives of many Jewish heroes including Moses who fled Egypt through the desert. Esther lives in the diaspora as a member of the Persian Empire and within this context as a religious minority. The diaspora takes on new meanings for the Sephardic Jews. Expelled in 1492 from their Iberian homeland, Sephardic Jews operate with a double notion of homeland. Part of the cultural memory and the stories that the Sephardic Jews tell about themselves and their ancestors include the relationships with two homelands that are no more. They do not compete so much as function together to mark the Sephardic peoples as members of a dual legacy, explained through the concept of a “double diaspora” explored by David Wacks . This double diaspora includes both Zion (following Babylonian captivity and the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem) and the Iberian Expulsion in

²Unless marked otherwise, all the provided translations are based upon David R. Slavitt’s 1999 translation of the *Poem of Queen Esther*. Slavitt’s translation is the definitive English-language translation of the poem. He successfully achieves and transmits a clear contextual translation. However, as I am interested in the literal meaning of the verses, for the purposes of my own close textual analysis, at times I find it useful to use my own translation.

1492 (3). For Wacks and for the purpose of this study, the “organizing concept of diaspora is especially productive in this case because it allows for a continuity of thought that respects 1492 but is not ruptured by it” (3). We could say that for *conversos* and the larger Sephardic Diaspora, Iberia is the overlapping homeland. They overlap because the concept of homeland for Sephardic Jews simultaneously refers to Zion and Iberia. Ultimately, when Sephardic Jews talk about their homeland, both of these places are referred to with overlapping sentiments of loss, nostalgia, and hope. Interpreting Iberia in this way allows us to go beyond the rupture model that sees 1492 as a breaking point, and instead looks to create a narrative, linking figures that create new connections in the diaspora.

With this notion of an overlapping homeland in mind, Pinto Delgado eventually made his way out of Portugal and to countries that permitted the free practice of Judaism, i.e., Amsterdam. Swetschinski calls Amsterdam the “Dutch Jerusalem” and acknowledges that part of cultural diasporic memory is the desire for return and connection to rabbinic Judaism (2). Although we are discussing a European capital and not a middle-eastern capital of Judaism, Swetschinski reveals the power and import that this city had for members of the Sephardic Diaspora and shows that for *converso* authors in the diaspora, it became a key concept in their written texts, such as in the case of the *Poema de la Reyna Ester*. In fact, “Amsterdam’s Portuguese Jews were the first group to create a body of religious and secular literature” (5). Once these *conversos* re-established their lives in Amsterdam, and returned to the open worship of Judaism, Swetschinski formulates how their identities shifted from that of “New Christians” (an Iberian categorization) to “New Jews.” In the context of Amsterdam, they were allowed to freely and openly practice Judaism, and in fact many returned to traditional rabbinic Judaism. This shifting and flexible notion of Sephardic identity is a hallmark of the Sephardic Diaspora. Although *conversos* exhibited tremendous flexibility in their identity once they arrived in Amsterdam and became part of the community, there was a profound insistence on the regulation of norms and stability from within.³ As the *conversos* individually shifted and became New Jews there was a careful regulation of borders and

³The *parnassim* was the religious regulatory body within the Sephardic community and ruled on many aspects of life of its constituents.

heterodoxy.⁴ This Dutch Jerusalem in its religious orthodoxy did not embrace nor encourage shape shifting.

Amsterdam became both a cultural and religious capital for “New Jews,” in fact this cultural capital reflects cultural geographer Peter Jackson’s elaboration that culture is “socially constructed and geographically expressed” (3). In this new geographic context of Amsterdam, Iberian Jews could openly practice Judaism. In this space, Sephardic Jews created a new type of nationalism and described themselves as members of the Portuguese Nation or the *Nação portuguesa*. In the words of Benedict Anderson, this national identity was imaginary because it existed beyond borders and throughout the diaspora. In fact, much like the biblical Jews and their relation to the Israelite homeland, it was defined by its diasporic nature. This nation existed in the minds and cultural practices of citizens strewn throughout the globe, who kept connections to each other through language, namely, Castilian Spanish.⁵ Portuguese *converso* born Menassah Ben Israel, came to Amsterdam as a child and returned to openly practicing Judaism. He was one of the first Rabbi’s educated in this community and in Amsterdam writes many texts including *La esperanza de Israel* where he specifically constructs the Iberian *conversos* as members of “our Portuguese Nation” (104).

⁴Upon discussing the patrolling of borders and heterodoxy I refer to both the regulation of everyday practices (marriage, children, religious observance) as well as the regulation of physical borders. New Jews were officially banned from returning to Iberia and other Catholic lands including Brussels as these were labeled: *tierras de idolatría* [lands of idolatry] (Rebollo Lieberman 2011, 9).

⁵Earlier I have discussed the centrality of the Castilian Spanish language in developing a Sephardic identity in the diaspora and in relation with Iberian Golden Age Spanish literary trends. This contemporary reality was very much in the mind of Samuel Usque when he relocated to Ferrara, Italy and defended his use of Portuguese in his *Consolaçam* stating that his “Primary intention was to speak to the Portuguese, to describe the record of our Diaspora, and by many sometimes circuitous means, to seek some relief from the hardships we have been enduring. It would therefore have been inappropriate for me to shun my mother tongue and to seek a borrowed language in which to speak to my countrymen. And though at one time there were many among us from the Diaspora of Castile—my own forbearers came from there—it seems more proper for me to consider the majority of our people today” (40). Throughout the Sephardic world, Portuguese was used to keep most communal records and was used alongside Castilian which was as we have seen reserved for high culture poems, philosophical tracts and other literary texts. This multilingual aspect of the Portuguese *conversos* contributed to their general sense of Iberianness within the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam.

He composed a compendium of religious Jewish laws entitled *Thesouro dos Dinim* (1645–1647), precisely for the *converso* population who “returned” to Judaism in Amsterdam and in the greater diaspora.

Similarly, Samuel Usque in his *Consolaçam* addresses this text to his *nation*: “I have seen members of our nation recently pursued and routed from the realms of Portugal, vacillating in their faith, resigning themselves unnecessarily and succumbing to their afflictions” (39). This concept of nation expressed by contemporary authors was neither fixed nor geographically bounded, but instead was fluid and took on new ideas as it moved throughout the globe. Cultural geographer Don Mitchell explains that: “Nation, nationalism, and cultural identity are never anything fixed, only always contested—and always intimately linked to the structures of power that govern our lives” (262). As the *converso* Jews entered into very different structures of power they encountered new possibilities as well as new challenges. In this process of “return,” Iberian *conversos* were carefully monitored by the Sephardic *parnassim* in Amsterdam (the religious government recognized by the state) that had the powers to excommunicate members that did not comply with religious expectations. In fact, they excommunicated one of their most well-known members; Baruch Spinoza in the seventeenth-century. Just as the Spanish Jews were expelled from Iberia; upon their return to Judaism in Amsterdam the *parnassim* called any nation under Catholic Spanish control including Portugal and Brussels, *tierras de idolatria* [lands of idolatry] and prohibited travel to this land with threat of excommunication (Rebollo Lieberman 2011, 9). Of course, Sephardic Jews continued to travel to these banned lands just as the expulsion did not stop them before. Although Iberian *conversos* could openly practice Judaism in Amsterdam, their religious practices learned through generations of secrecy in Iberia, led to dramatic differences in every-day practice and a steep learning curve. One way to differentiate *converso* practice from open Sephardic practice is the *conversos*’ reliance on the Bible, whereas the Sephardim outside of Iberia had access to texts including the Talmud and the Mishnah. Although the religious character and practice of Iberian *conversos* is an important concept in this text, I am particularly interested in understanding the cultural identity of these Iberian *conversos* or the subjects of the *Nação portuguesa*, the *homens da nação* [men of the nation], who returned to open Judaism.

Swetschinski defines “portugueseness” for this community as almost entirely cultural. The group called the Portuguese Nation is removed

from the physical borders of Portugal yet they created an imagined community through their physical presence and written texts. As many had mixed roots due to freedom of movement agreements between the Spain and Portugal in the early sixteenth-century, a central aspect of this identity is Iberian. As previously noted, authors of the Portuguese Nation wrote in Castilian Spanish in order to express this identity and to connect with contemporary Spanish Golden Age literary trends. Historian Miriam Bodian shows that intellectuals from this community wrote in Castilian—it was considered the poetic language par excellence (Bodian 1997, 92). Delgado very much looks to Iberia for cues in the formal composition of his text. Even though his native language was Portuguese, he writes stylistically within Golden Age standards and in Castilian as was common for many renown authors (*converso* or not) including Gil Vicente and Francisco de Sá de Miranda. His texts along with other authors show the material interaction between these different nations.

What are some aspects that connect members of a community defined by its mobility, to the extent that its membership feels that they are part of a unified nation? This dynamic group maintained cohesion through their literature, language, and cultural religious traditions. All members of this group participated in collective practices that tied them together and created a common base of belief upon which to understand each other throughout drastically different geographical contexts. Swetschinski elaborates that “In every form of expression the Portuguese Jews remained consciously and distinctly Iberian” (285). These “New Jews” took to:

mobilizing [a] biblical past to support a continued social identity, the Portuguese Jews, in essence, created a new an ethnic identity that was neither Iberian nor Jewish; a hybrid identity in which the fusion of disparate religious and cultural elements occurred after the original union was given up as too ambivalent to be shared and as offering, moreover, no simple continuity, religious or other, from past to present. (323)

Hybridity and accommodation is one of the most basic reasons that the Esther figure is so relevant and widely accepted as a central figure for *conversos* and the Portuguese Nation. We are talking about ethnicity created by shared and invented narratives, some of these ideas that the *conversos* maintained included the retelling of the story of Queen Esther and

the physical practice of in the Fast of Esther. We first saw this practice in Godínez's *La Reyna Ester* [The Queen Esther], and as we will see in the next chapter, crypto-Jews used fasting instead of feasting to connect with biblical ancestors because it was less observable. Crucially, it was crypto-Jewish women who preserved these fasts as they maintained continuity in the home when their merchant husbands were away (we will see how a very large percentage of the male *converso* population were merchants and part of global trade networks). It is no wonder that the female *conversas* and crypto-Jews in Iberia and in the diaspora found in Esther a relatable heroine that shared a similar lived experience. For Swetschinski, "What is ethnic about the Portuguese Jews is not their intention of a great deal of Iberian culture, but their coupling of that culture with a Judaism that was no longer part of it, the generic ancestral Judaism of the Bible. Their ethnicity is a new, modern concoction for which there exists no antecedents in Jewish history" (323). Forged abroad and named the Portuguese Nation, this new identity was a novel creation, very much a hybrid combination of cultural and religious traditions. We will see this idea especially reinforced in the final chapter with the case of Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal. These two crypto-Jewish sisters in the New World combined Catholic and Jewish practices in order to survive and enable the continuance of Jewish cultural and religious traditions. They used female biblical models—especially Esther and Judith—to give them strength in the adverse situation that they faced. Similarly, the idea that a *Sephardic difference* is located in the female figure functions as Esther moves around the globe with these diasporic communities including Amsterdam and the New World.⁶ The *Sephardic difference* is not only located within Esther herself but within the bodies of the women such as the Carvajals as they take on material practices to celebrate Esther as a model. Within the Portuguese Nation in Amsterdam, Esther embodies a new type of nationhood and permits a discussion of self-fashioning for the subjects of this diasporic nation.

Poema de la Reyna Ester is dedicated to "Al ilustrissimo y reverendissimo Cardenal de Richelieu, Gran Maestre, Supremo, y superintendente General de la Navegación, y comercio de Francia" (a). [To the illustrious

⁶In the introduction, I defined the concept of the *Sephardic difference* as the process by which ideals of nationhood, empire and self-fashioning were projected and inscribed upon the female figure.

and revered Cardinal of Richelieu, Great Teacher, Supreme and General Superintendent of Seafaring, and commerce of France]. According to Slavitt, Delgado dedicated his text to Cardinal de Richelieu not because of his treatment of *conversos* seeking religious freedom in France, but because he was helpful to the *converso* merchants who participated in the extensive transatlantic trade routes (xii).⁷ The mercantile context is a key element to understanding this community shaped both by the negative effects of exile and the willingness and ability to participate in trade networks that “cut across and link rival empires, trade systems, and confessional blocs throughout the Western Atlantic world” (Israel, “Jews and Crypto-Jews...” 3). Jonathan Israel defines the Sephardic diaspora by their trade networks which linked all continents and crossed all religious boundaries (“Diasporas Jewish and non-Jewish” 19). We see the imaginary of this maritime world reflected through a prism of doubt and insecurity throughout the text, coupled with faith and hope expressed by upholding Esther as an inspirational heroine.

Delgado often employs the image of a “puerto seguro” or a safe port amidst the chaos of a world turned upside down. He writes in his dedication: “allando yo un puerto seguro, refugio de mis naufragios, de que no está libre ningún hombre en el mar proceloso, donde navegan” (a2v). [I was looking for a safe port, a refuge from my shipwrecks, of which no man is free in this turbulent sea]. The safe harbor he finds in exile, and the “mar proceloso” or a turbulent sea that he refers to is the dire situation facing Iberian *conversos*. Delgado finds inspiration and solace in the Esther story, as it that takes a similarly fraught situation facing the Jewish people and concludes with their freedom. It also connects with Jonathan Israel’s formulation of the unique role of the Sephardim and crypto-Jews through the prism of the early modern maritime empires (4). Clearly reflecting the turbulent nature of sea travel and mercantile activity, in seventeenth-century Amsterdam an “imposta board” was created to ransom Jews and “Iberian exiles captured in the Mediterranean” (Swetschinski 180). This board also reveals the heavy involvement of Sephardic Jews in maritime commerce.

⁷For more detailed information on the Sephardic trading diasporas see Jonathan Israel’s; *Diaspora with a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World of Maritime Empires* (1540–1740).

The metaphor of a safe port developed in this text is keenly relatable for the *converso* and crypto-Jewish population in the early modern period. Andrée Aelion Brooks expands a similar idea of the sea and sailing imagery as representing the *converso* experience. She points out that this was the image used on the front cover of the *Ferrara Siddur* (1552), the critically important bible for *converso* Jews in the diaspora. Written in Castilian it was published by the *converso* population in Italy and for the *converso* population in the diaspora. Brooks describes “The front cover sported an elaborate design, the center of which was a lively drawing of two tall ships with elevated hulls and lateen sails—similar in style to those used by Christopher Columbus. They were being tossed off course and damaged, albeit not sunken, by an angry sea—a metaphor, no doubt, for *converso* life” (265). The context of persecution that the *conversos* faced in Iberia can be directly related to Haman’s plans for the Persian Jews. We read how “Que pueblo tanto humildes oprimia” (41). [What a people, so many humbly oppressed] (*my translation*). Both the rhetorical concept of a safe port, and the physical reality of a safe port in Amsterdam offered solace and comfort to *conversos* in the diaspora.

The sea has a doubly important meaning in this text: it is both where the diaspora occurs and is where the Sephardic community engages in trade. Ian Chambers explores the idea of the sea as a transitory and unstable space, just as we see presented in this story. He interprets the Mediterranean as an exploratory space where new ideas can come together and interact. The sea also becomes a metaphor for struggle to describe Haman’s aggression towards the Jewish people “Entre las ondas confiada vuela/De su jactancia la soberbia nave,/El viento nuevo con furor la vela” (29). [On the Court’s turbulent ocean, Haman sails,/a proud vessel careening against the force/of buffeting winds that do not obstruct but serve/instead to hasten him further along his course] (34). The sea could be the Mediterranean or the Atlantic; in the early modern period both could and did connect *converso* figures to safe ports within Europe’s boundaries and also to the New World. These *conversos* and Delgado himself were as Adam Sutcliffe’s termed “port Jews.” He defines Port Jews as having “access to modernity” because of the “open and diverse environment of commercial pragmatism and cultural tolerance” (23). The experience Delgado reproduces in the poem is defined by the dynamism and opportunities provided by the ports around Europe. Amsterdam’s ports were particularly far reaching, as Dutch colonization was a huge part of their seventeenth-century empire and Jews

found their way to Brazil and the Dutch Caribbean. Amsterdam was also a particularly open and tolerant place in the early seventeenth-century. It legally allowed for the coexistence of different religious communities and independent governance within them. We read in the text:

Este la escala, y Norte es a la vida,
 Que al monte sube, que la mar navega,
 Y de la pena, y ondas combatida,
 Al prado alegre, al dulce puerto llega;
 Brotando eternos, en el bien más cierto
 El valle frutos, y descanso el puerto. (66)

Here, reduced in scale, in his empire,
 its high mountains, its fertile fields, its coast
 where the trading vessels come into port with rich
 cargoes. In peace, his people prosper, and most
 are grateful to him and therefore loyal, as he
 lives up to their ideals of majesty. (61)

In the line: “Este la escala, y Norte es a la vida,” [Here, reduced in scale, in his empire,] the port is presented as a symbol of Ahasueros’ empire. Similarly, we read in the text how the harbor is a symbol of his good leadership: “Al prado alegre, al dulce puerto llega;/Brotando eternos,” [In peace, his people prosper, and most/are grateful to him and therefore loyal].⁸ The poem presents a dynamic world in flux, where secret worship and practice could be exposed. These ports are conceived of as safe spaces that offer respite: “descanso el puerto” [rest in port] (*my translation*).⁹ In port in Amsterdam, the turbulent reality of the *conversos* lives gives way to peace, riches, and rest.

⁸See Jonathan Israel’s *Diaspora within a Diaspora*.

⁹As previously stated, I will use my own translations when the line level analysis from the original Castilian poem departs from Slavitt’s English translation.

Poema de la Reyna Ester is a call to unite many voices in the diaspora, he writes: “Forme la voz de muchas voces una” (70) [make one voice from many voices] (*my translation*). There is also the questioning of wills and what changes the will resolve of a people “que mueva al alvedrio” [that which moves fate] (*my translation*). Who determines the fate of a people? This type of questioning and the ability to change one’s fate and the desires of a population is particularly apposite for *conversos* in this period. Although we see trade networks connecting distant lands throughout history, the character of the Sephardic trade networks facilitated the transfer of ideas, culture, and religious practices throughout Europe and across the Atlantic to the New World. As we will see in the next chapter, these networks ensured both the livelihood of the Carvajal family in the colonial context of New Spain, and also helped the Carvajal family maintain and learn about Jewish traditions from the other side of the Atlantic. In a context of persecution and the fear of death, this mercantile network allowed otherwise inaccessible communities to be linked precisely through literary and oral tradition. The “libertad agena” (68) [another’s freedom] (*my translation*) referenced in the poem is a dream that is recognized as possible because of the contacts that *converso* Jews maintained around the globe. This citation comes from the episode in the poem when the king learns that Mordechai saves him from a plot on his life. In this passage, the king thinks about his own fate and much to Haman’s dismay wants to reward Mordechai for his loyalty. This passage reveals that even the king’s freedom is subject to attack.

The sea itself also plays a central role in this poem. It is a metaphor for the changing experiences of the *conversos* in the diaspora, and its volatility from rocky to calm seas reflects the lived experience of many. In some instances in the poem, the sea reflects an environment of enormous despair: “En las ondas crecia un mar furioso” (41) [of a mighty ocean with waves that came surging and crashing] (44). The image of the sea is also present in other *converso* texts including Usque’s *Consolaçam*, where he compares the experience of the Jewish people to a “ship tossed by shifting tempests on the high sea, unable to steer its prow toward any of the four corners of the world, so do I, afflicted Israel, still roll in the troughs of my peril” (215). The frontispiece of this text depicts a globe in movement reflecting the reality of the many locations throughout the world in which the Sephardim were strewn. The *Poema de la Reyna Ester* constructs the ocean as a battlefield of various ideas and identities that affect even the king:

Un mar tranquilo, donde no comueven
 La menor onda en su furor los vientos,
 Es su interior, y humildes no se atreven
 Formar batalla varios pensamientos:
 Que sin temor de poderoso encuentro
 Su mundo llaman de quietud el centro. (25)

Picture a turbulent sea where furious winds
 whip the towering waves into a churning
 fury, and then, suppose some tranquil depth
 where there is silent stillness. The king is yearning
 for that repose and respite: equipoise
 is what he craves, not business and noise. (31)

This scene occurs after the king makes the difficult decision to depose Vashti and finds a new queen in Esther. This passage can be read in two ways; firstly, it can represent the king's loss of Queen Vashti and how he is going to reestablish order in his own life. Secondly, it can be read as the experience of the minority population in the kingdom—the *conversos* in the diaspora. We can see this second idea in the line “en su interior” [suppose some tranquil depth], as *conversos* were made to interiorize their faith as private, open worship was not permissible in all contexts. Similarly, maintenance of worship amidst persecution is constructed as something only for the very brave as we see in the line “y humildes no se atreven” [where the humble don't dare go] (*my translation*). With courage, the interior space can still afford tranquility. In many cases, *conversos* had to live their religious practice in secret and in private. In fact, among *conversos*, individual relationships with religious worship increased in this period and this idea is reflected in this poem (Schwartz 60). Amidst the collective notions of national identity and cultural identity, the poem presents the centrality of individual connections that subjects express with their religion. Without the presence of a rabbi, many *conversos* had no choice but to create direct connections with God within their religious practice, this aspect was especially important for female practitioners

because within orthodox rabbinic Judaism women were not allowed to take on official religious roles as rabbis or cantors or as leaders within the *parnassim* (Jewish leadership council in Amsterdam).¹⁰

In this poem, salvation is a central concept and is presented as a real possibility. We see in the following passage how the soul, read *converso*, is pitched between the waves:

El alma, que en las olas fluctuaba,
 Como oprimida de furioso viento,
 Y en sentencia mortal solo aguardava,
 Del verdugo cruel, golpe sangriento;
 El puerto alcanza, y en quietud serena
 La mar se vuelve, en libertad su pena. (98)

The soul, that is pitched between the waves,
 As if oppressed by a furious wind,
 And only from a mortal sentence is saved,
 From the cruel executioner, whose bloody blow;
 The port is reached, and in serene calm
 The sea turns, his pain into freedom. (*my translation*)

The natural maritime world is used to reflect the tenuous situation facing the Portuguese Nation outside the safe harbor of Amsterdam. The executioner in the “verdugo cruel” [cruel executioner] with his bloody blow is clearly present in the minds of this group of people who have just fled from the very real control of the Portuguese Inquisition. Freedom expressed in the last line of the stanza is the ultimate goal for those Iberian *conversos* escaping persecution. Specifically, freedom means the

¹⁰Within the Amsterdam community, women had quite restrictive roles both in their religious lives and participation in the synagogue as well as within public spaces. Julia R. Lieberman explores this “male centered focus on family life and religious education and communal life” in this context (2011, 158).

ability to practice their religion openly and without fear of oppression in the diaspora.

In this turbulent world, Esther is presented as an instrument of change and as a heroine that guides her people across the seas and helps navigate them over the rocky waves.

Como la nave, que del viento ayrado,
 Entre las ondas, fluctuar se via,
 Sossiega el mar, y vuelta a nuevo estado
 Oprime el agua, el ayre desasia;
 Tal, perdido el temor, cobrado aliento,
 La Reyna dize a quien le escucha atento. (56)

Imagine a ship that pitches and yaws in the waves
 of a turbulent ocean, but then, as the storm relents,
 rights itself, as it sails fill and it glides
 on a glassy blue, and you will have some sense
 of Esther's settled spirit, as confidently
 she plots her course on a now pacific sea. (54)

Delgado credits Esther for the deliverance of the Jewish people by changing Ahasueros' position regarding the fate of the Jewish people in the Persian Empire. She is one of the women that Rosilie Hernández shows "who take advantage as their roles as wives to counsel their husbands and use their influence to change the destiny of their nations" (236). In this passage, Esther stands out as a model of bravery and strength.

Delgado also celebrates Esther as a model of female purity and virtue in the diaspora. Using the natural and often feminized world for inspiration, we read in the text how Ahasueros reveals how Esther changed his position: "Fecundo ser de tu virtud florece;/Que en el instante en otro me transforma,/Qual la material, a quien mudó la forma" (83) Fertility flourishes from your virtue;/In that instant I transform into another,/This is the material reality, to whom that changes form.] (*my*

translation). Esther uses her virtue and purity for political ends, as Hernández explores: “We can clearly see the utility of a biblical history that frames, validates, and promotes the connection between women’s pious and political lives” (232). Unlike in the *autos sacramentales* that we explored in chapter one, Esther in this text is constructed as the principal heroine. As within the notion of the *Sephardic difference* Esther’s figure is inscribed with heroic qualities. Although Pinto Delgado does not call her Saint Esther as do the Carvajal women in the last chapter, she is upheld to this same high standard. By fulfilling contemporary gender norms, she is allowed to take on a role distinct from all Sephardic men in the diaspora. She is a central heroine, looked to as a model, and by many *conversos* compared to a saintly figure, risking personal sacrifice for the good of her people. Like this biblical model, there are known historical female figures that paid ransoms and helped *conversos* escape from Iberia including patron of the arts, Doña Gracia Mendes de Luna. Born in Portugal to a well heeled family and later wed to one of the wealthiest Portuguese courtiers at the time, Doña Gracia was patron to the *Ferrara Siddur* and other religious texts. Significantly, she used her sizable fortune to help *conversos* escape from Iberia. Similarly, Benvenida Abravanel used her capital to ransom captive *conversos* and for other charitable means. These contemporary models helped shape how Esther was recounted in the early modern period and why authors made her figure relevant for subjects looking for guidance in the diaspora.

Unlike the other texts (tapestries, *autos sacramentales*, *comedias*) that we have explored thus far that were written with an Iberian ruler in mind who was seeking obedience from within the realm, Pinto Delgado not looking to uphold this idea of compliance and loyalty. Instead he is a community leader that is looking to comfort other *conversos* in the diaspora. He describes the outside world as oppressive and invokes the inspiration that Esther offers:

Que si tu llama en mi tibiesa reyna,
 Si anima el coraçon tu voz sagrada,
 Será mi canto la piedosa Reyna,
 Que à Jacob libertó de fiera espada;
 Quando el volver de sus beninos ojos

Negó su sangre al mûdo por despojos. (2)

Into my spirit's murk, your bright light shines;
 it is your voice that sounds in my throat, Lord,
 as I undertake to celebrate that Queen
 who long ago saved Israel from the sword,
 a glance of whose beautiful eyes, appealing and sweet,
 kept our blood from spilling onto the street. (13)

Esther is constructed as the savior of the Jewish people. She kept them out of harm's way, from violence and the spilling of blood. This violence is a very real reminder of the persecution that the Iberian *conversos* faced at the hands of the Inquisition, and is part of the cultural memory present for all members of the Sephardic Diaspora and especially for those members of the *nação portuguesa*.

Esther is the guiding and beautiful light that not only protects the Jewish people from violence but also guides this population to salvation. She is described in the text as "El sol el alma, y su hermosura estrella" (19). [Like the sun,/she warms the world and dazzles everyone] (26). In this moment of intense hardship and persecution in his own life, Delgado connects with a Jewish heroine. Although she has more agency in this poem than in Lope's *comedia*, like Lope's Esther, she still complies with the gendered world order presented for women in the early modern period. Namely, Esther is a strikingly beautiful subject and this aspect definitely agrees with the different biblical accounts of the story. Connecting to the Esther that Lope de Vega depicts in *La hermosa Ester*, she is later described according to the Petrarchan tradition of courtly love from head downward. According to this tradition that early modern authors complied with, we read in the text how first her eyes, then cheeks, and lips are described:

Los ojos, que modestos representan
 De piedad interior divino indicio
 Bultos al cielo, en humildad frequentan,
 En ardiente oración, tanto ejercicio;

Y es el humor, que de su centro exala,
Qual el rocío, que la flor regala. (19)

Her eyes, those windows of the soul, are full
of understanding, kindness, and a rare
compassion. When she raises them heavenward
in a fervor of humility and prayer,
simply to be near her is a gift—
a flower from which the sweetest perfume drift. (27)

The poem continues to dedicate another stanza to her lips: “El dulce labio, que a la rosa enseña” (19), [Her lips are like that blossom’s inner petals] (27), her rosy cheeks, and hair “Por que al cabello el oro no le encubra” (22), [Her hair peeps out from a shimmer of gold cloth] (29). She is compared to a heavenly being “a la celeste inclina” (24) [celestial will] (30). The king also says to Esther “Si el cielo miro un cielo en ti contemplo” (55). [I look into your eyes and in them glimpse/what paradise was like, or heaven must be] (53). This heavenly comparison could be interpreted as either a Jewish or Christian image; in fact given the context of the poem, I argue that it is both. It is shared expression of faith, like that of many other *converso* authors who grew up as a publicly practicing Catholics in Portugal.

Characteristic of Lope’s Esther, and the early modern images of female figures in general, beauty is considered an intrinsic virtue. In *Poema de la Reyna Ester*, Esther’s virtue is referred to as “Virtud secreta” (95) [my soul’s goal] (82) or [secret virtue] (*my translation*). In addition to fulfilling gendered norms, it is also a concept that resonates with the situation of *conversos* and crypto-Jews in the Sephardic Diaspora. Many of these subjects maintain their Jewish practices—their religiously virtuous Jewish practices—in secret and out of sight of the Inquisition. Esther is depicted as a deeply pious person, something that is not found in the original biblical source text.¹¹ This religious piety is another aspect

¹¹ Although the image of a pious Esther does not have roots in the original source text, it does have roots in rabbinic interpretation. According to Dov Walfish, the Book of Esther was “commented by scholars of every generation” (1).

of how Esther performs the *Sephardic difference*. She is presented as in prayer or “en oración” before going to the king (51). This idea connects with the previous chapter where Godínez in *La Reyna Ester* presents an observant queen. Because of her virtuosity, Esther is constructed as the messenger or the “medio” through which the survival of her people occurs (50).

Esther’s figure also resonates with other central female figures in this time period including Isabel la Católica, the monarch who took on a pivotal role in her nation’s imaginary in early modern Spain. As Barbara Weissberger describes “Isabel’s reinforcement of the medieval sex/gender system was instrumental to her rise to power and basic to her political agenda. The subordination of women to men based on the need to control women’s natural irrationality and concupiscence and the prohibition of nonprocreative sexual acts are central to the rhetorical battles waged in her name” (2009, 43). It is important to note that Queen Esther is not a mother. In fact, she is depicted as pleasing to the king and this pleasure is not procreative. In this way, the two Queens: Esther and Isabel differ, because maternal virtue was one of the primary ways in which Isabel la Católica was celebrated and upheld as a virtuous model of femininity. Esther maintains female virtue through other means. Although public policy crafted by Haman looks to exterminate the Jewish population, Esther does not agree with the politics of state: “El Rey, que en la promessa manifiesta/Su firme amor, la obra sollicita;/ Viendo Iudá su luto vuelto en fiesta/Sigue el camino, que a su gloria incita” (97) [The messengers come again with the latest news/of what the king has ordered with heaven’s assent—/it is decreed in Shushan that those who oppressed/or threatened Jews are liable to punishment] (84). Esther carefully works the political machinery to outsmart her opponent Haman and use her relationship with the king to save the Jewish people. Unlike the *autos sacramentales* where Mordechai has a more central role in the Jewish people’s salvation than Esther, here in this poem, we are exposed to a type of cooperation between these two figures as initially presented in Godínez’s *La Reyna Ester*: “La Reyna manda, y Mardochoy preside” (97). [The Queen’s proposal Mordechai has sealed] (84). This idea parallels the cooperation between the two Catholic monarchs as we can see from the mantra of equal reign or balance of power on their iconic heraldic shield “tanto monta, monta tanto”. This slogan points to the idea of shared rule for the royals. Although the reign between Isabel and Ferdinand in Castile was constructed as shared, Isabel made it clear

that she was the leader of Castile and as the more powerful component of the empire wielded more influence. We see a similar idea reflected in this passage because if “La Reyna manda, y Mordochay preside,” Esther is the one that commands and Mordechai carries out her proposal.

Poema de la Reyna Ester presents a strong empire that can be related both to the political Iberian empire as we have seen in the case of the *Esther and Ahasueros* tapestries, the *autos sacramentales* and to the cultural *nação portuguesa*. We read in the text: “y dellos el tribute, en larga copia,/Desde la India ofrece la Etiopia/Gobierno abraça de provincias ciento,/Que vyente y siete aumeta con su imperio” (2). [India’s gold and Africa’s treasure/heaped up in Shushan, wealthy beyond measure./A hundred provinces he governed. Of these, no fewer than twenty-seven were his own conquests, within the short three years in which he had been sitting on his kingdom’s throne] (14). Like in the tapestries and *autos*, Ahasueros acknowledges the “la grandeza de su opulencia, y caza” (1), [the grandeur of his opulent house] (13). Whereas in the *autos*, Godínez’s rewritten *comedia*—*Amán y Mardoqueo*, and Lope’s *La hermosa Ester*, all present a clear connection between the Persian Empire with the contemporary and the growing Spanish Empire; in *Poema de la Reyna Ester*, we can draw parallels between the Persian Empire and the Sephardic trade networks and the *nação portuguesa*. Just like the new nation-in-diaspora that is being created, a new empire is also being imagined in this passage. Although these trade networks cut across boundaries, much like the nascent Spanish nation, and its expansion in the New World. The network Delgado imagines links its’ subjects through language and religion—two foundational elements of Spanish imperial expansion. National identity and the identity of an individual subject are conflated in a work that knits linguistic, cultural, and religious identities. Just like the *conversos* whose Jewish and Christian practices could not be disassociated, this new type of national identity transcended boundaries and power relationships shifted in the diaspora. In fact it created a new type of belonging, and depicts a new type of citizenry. Jonathan Israel explores the unique role of the Sephardic Diaspora in the early modern period in connecting all religious spheres and the New and Old Worlds through its maritime empires. He shows that the Sephardic Empire matured in the latter part of the seventeenth-century and maintained dominance for over a century and a half. Israel determines that it was the only empire to be “geographically scattered” and “religiously close knit.” Its commercial networks were underpinned by

language and communal institutions unlike any other community or national state (2).¹²

Poema de la Reyna Ester upholds the biblical source text's omission of God in an attempt to connect *conversos* to their biblical counterparts. However, there are many references to the heavens scattered throughout the text for example: "si el cielo miro un cielo en ti contemplo..." (55) [I look into your eyes and in them glimpse/what paradise was like, or heaven must be] (53). Here Esther is presented as the earthly body that houses heaven. We also read in the text: "Que al cielo deve, y ser el cielo vive" (107). [We give/and receive gifts, to remind one another how heaven was moved to help us] (92). The influence of the stars in heaven can be interpreted as an allusion to the fact that the date of destruction of the Jews was decided by casting lots. Purim in Hebrew means "lots" and refers to the diving game or a game of chance that Haman engaged in order to select the date of annihilation. This plot to exterminate the Jews is also related by Mordechai who employs the image of the heavens and in the next line calls this message a "cruel sentence": "El cielo sabe mi dolor, le dize/La Reyna, oyendo la cruel sentencia,/Y el mundo, que a la ley se contradize" (48). [The heavens know my pain, he said to her/The Queen, hearing the cruel sentence, (*my translation*)/what hurt Haman will cause her kinsmen] (Slavitt 48). In the line "oyendo la cruel sentencia," the text mobilizes spiritual images that follow a type of Inquisitorial language that would have been familiar to *conversos*.

Haman asks the king in the following passage to condemn the Jewish people, specifically addressing the fact that they obey God before king. This contrasts directly with the use of God in the *autos* to justify empire, conquest, and obedience. Unlike in the *autos*, the reference to God is not direct—it is expressed by saying "nuestra ley la suya diferente," [our law different from yours] (*my translation*). The Inquisitorial records categorized *judaizantes* [judaizers] as those who followed the *Ley de Moïsen* [The Law of Moses] which juxtaposed with the majority society who followed the *Ley de Cristo* [Law of Christ]. Delgado upholds this division

¹²Israel determines that what makes the Western Sephardic Diaspora unique in this period is the connection between all continents through trade, whereas other non-Jewish commercial diasporas existed including the Greeks, Armenians and Huguenots these diasporas only spanned a part of the world. In terms of religious and cultural transmission across geographic spaces, the Sephardic Diaspora saw a complete shared set of belief, while these other groups achieved only a partial influence across the continents.

in the text, mobilizing the dichotomy constructed by the Inquisitorial language. The poem continues as Haman angrily addresses the king trying to further his cause:

Como, señor, tu magestad consiente
Un pueblo, dize, al mundo licenciado?

Si a nuestra ley la suya diferente

Miras oppuesta a, general reposo?

Y en fiera obstinación de su alvedrio

Sacude el yugo, niega el señorio. (35)

“How does your majesty allow,” he asks,

“an alien element here who do not observe

your laws but keep their own? How can you let

such insolence go unpunished? They do not serve

your majesty but a god they cannot see.

They defy you and they live! How can this be? (39)

Reflecting the hybrid context out of which the poem emerged, the story is recognizable for both Jews and Christians. “Si a nuestra ley la suya diferente” [If our law very different from yours] clearly sets up the multiple confessional communities found in both the Persian Empire and in the Iberian empire in the early modern period. The idea of a group of people united by religious practice and belief is once again transmitted in the following lines: “Y el golpe siento de furiosa espada/Contra mi pueblo, y contra mi la temo;” (84) [Bitter hatred, like a sword,/hangs over my head and those of my people]. The idea of a people or a nation like the *nação portuguesa* is clearly reflected in these lines of solidarity, fear, and persecution. These ideas of punishment and distress are further recounted in the poem: “Contra mi pueblo, en el castigo injusto:/Que en el temor, que de su mal padeco,” (90) [against my terrified people, sorely distressed/although they have done no wrong] (79).

The queen understands her role as a member of this community at risk and her influence as a member of court. At great personal uncertainty, Esther says to the king:

Mas si respetan leyes de tu Imperio,
 Vasallos sirven, siervos reconocen,
 Más estimando; en este, el cautiverio,
 Que libertad, que en otro reyno gozen;
 Esta lealtad, que el cielo remunera,
 No temiendo castigo, el premio espera. (92)

My people will be grateful to you, my lord,
 respect your laws and hold you in high esteem,
 offering freely what no regime can compel—
 a part of that love they feel for the supreme
 Lord of the universe who reigns on high
 Whose judgment we submit to when we die. (80)¹³

Esther carefully calls upon notions of obedience to a just ruler as part of her rhetorical strategy to convince Ahasueros to help her people. She also carefully juxtaposes the difficulties of captivity and punishment that the Jewish people face with new values of liberty, loyalty, service, and personal choice. She appeals to the idea of a strong empire in gaining the Jewish people's support. This concept of loyalty is different from what we have just seen in the *autos sacramentales*. The *autos* look for absolute obedience from Iberian subjects, instead in *Poema de la Reyna Ester*,

¹³David R. Slavitt in his English translation provides the term "Lord" to represent the idea of "cielo" or heavens presented in the original Spanish. The meaning is similar, but in my analysis it is important that the actual word for God/Dios or Lord/Señor does not appear because what differentiates the biblical Book of Esther from all other books in the bible is that it does not mention God. As shown in some of the other retellings that I analyze including the *autos sacramentales*, the word God is used and this is a specific and calculated plotment by the author that reflects the context out of which it was produced.

Esther reconceives the notion of obedience as a choice that is given or not given in exchange for pledging loyalty. In the lines “offering freely what no regime can compel,” we witness a completely new idea of authority with relation to the church and state. Unlike in the *autos* where obedience is fundamental and the higher powers of church and state must be absolutely recognized and obeyed, in this text, allegiance cannot be compelled by an authority, instead it is given by a subject with agency. The just king gains loyalty by protecting his subjects through love instead of fear because it is God that they ultimately answer to. Salvation and redemption in the diaspora is possible. Jews will be accepted into new lands and will be encouraged to live their lives according to their religious beliefs. Obviously, this is a metaphor for the expectation of their lives as open Jews outside of Iberia in places like Amsterdam.¹⁴

In the following passage, Ahasueros reinforces the value of liberty and free-will. In celebrating Mordechai who, in his role as advisor, saves the king from an assassination plot. Ahasueros remarks wistfully how quickly fortunes can be changed. Questioning free will and arbitrary mechanisms of control put into place in this period, Delgado creates a parallel with the treatment of religious others in Iberia. We read in the text:

Si la traición conspira en daño mio,
 (Que pende el secreto de accidente vario)
 Que espuela di, que mueva al alvedrio?
 Que obligue el alma a efeto voluntario?
 Y quien el premio, liberal, ordena
 Por precio compra libertad agena. (68)
 If treason conspired to hurt me,
 (What will depend on the scale of the various cases)
 What spur did I give, that changes fate?
 What obliges the soul to voluntarily change?

¹⁴Contemporary mercantilist states such as Amsterdam valued “productive” subjects. Within this new political reality, Jews as productive members of society were rewarded with religious freedoms and granted legal protections and rights.

And you receive the prize, liberally orders

That for a price one can buy another's¹⁵ freedom. (*my translation*)

In the line “que mueva alvedrio” or that which changes fate, the text presents the idea that Ahasueros’s subjects can betray him on a whim. In the line “por precio compra libertad agena” we see the concept that the Jewish people can buy their freedom abroad, for a price. In this passage, we have Ahasueros ruminating on how tenuous his position is, susceptible to the inclinations of fate, in a frenzied world. Despite his massive authority, and all the mediation that he provides, the governmental order is a construct and the king is still subject to an essentially chaotic situation, not fundamentally different than that of the Jewish people, characterized as a ship on the ocean.¹⁶ This stands in stark contrast to the Spanish Empire whose project is claiming that it itself is the natural ordained order, and that chaos through heterogeneity should be exterminated.

There is an obvious parallel between the author’s personal experience and Esther’s world. This poem collapses the temporal difference between seventeenth-century Europe and the biblical Middle East; and Delgado imbues the story with new flavors because of its historical context. In this way, as Seidman shows us: “Jewish culture, as other cultures, emerges as a continual translation and transformation, in different languages and at different moments in time” (10). The poem offers a guide to those *conversos* in the diaspora who want to return to Judaism. Delgado writes in the poem that the soul always finds its way home, just as he found his way back to his faith. We read in the poem: “Y el alma, por la senda verdadera/A compañada de su fee camina;/Ni la suspende el tiempo, o la esperanza” (24). [Distracted neither by hopes nor fears, but steady/in her devotion. Whatever may await/will be at heaven’s pleasure. How can she then/object or say a word—except ‘Aman’?)] (30). The idea of returning to their Jewish faith and heritage has been explored by historian Adam Sutcliffe as “pragmatic acculturation” (27). For Delgado, the

¹⁵ *Agena* can be translated as either “another’s” or a “foreign body.”

¹⁶ This idea also connects to potential fissures that could arise in the kingdom were Ahasueros not to regain control over his queen and by extension his empire in the beginning of the biblical text. This was one of the central motivations for her banishment and the subsequent search for a new queen.

return to the Jewish faith is described as the enlightened path. Religious piety, virtuous worship, and pragmatic acculturation define the *Sephardic difference* that figures such as Esther embody for subjects in the diaspora. We must remember Delgado returned to practicing normative Judaism in Amsterdam after living as a *converso* in Portugal. This biblical story keeps hope alive for figures such as Delgado and he writes his poem hoping to inspire the same ideas in others.

The poem ends with a celebration of this new empire that is created by the New Jews. The Iberian empire from the *autos* is replaced by the Sephardic community; in fact, Delgado creates a new empire that combines common cultural, linguistic, economic and religious practice. We read in the text:

Este del mal las fuerças disminuye,
 Y con sus a las siempre al bien camina,
 Que en la esperanza su remedio arguye,
 Que firme funda en la piedad divina;
 Si tu poder, si tu valor es tanto,
 Al par del mundo te celebre el canto. (111)

For surely he is opposed to wickedness,
 and with his wings helps goodness soar as high
 as our hopes should be in that ultimate salvation
 established by his mercy. This is why
 we adore him so. Wise, majestic, and strong,
 may his Name be praised forever in our song. (94)

Through the figure of a female Jewess, a crypto-Jewess who comes out and reveals her identity at just the right moment—Delgado tells a story of redemption and triumph for the Jewish people. Although writing from outside Iberia, Delgado as a Portuguese *converso* has firsthand experience of Iberia from within. His poem reflects this curious position of being two things simultaneously, a defining characteristic of *converso* identity. Mitchell determines that “Culture is never any thing, but it is rather a struggled-over set of social relations, relations shot through with

structures of power, structures of dominance and subordination” (xv). This text is a product of the early modern Sephardic Diaspora. Travelling across geographical seas and the seas of time, this text helps connect Delgado with this biblical heroine to ask the essential question—how can the Sephardic people be incorporated into new contexts and historical realities? In *Poema de la Reyna Ester*, Esther is strikingly upheld as a heroine and a model of strength for those who are in difficult circumstances. These retellings read together represent the disparate voices of the Sephardic Diaspora; they look at Iberia from within and outside and together make a compelling argument about empire and identity in the early modern period. As previously stated, Pinto Delgado published this text originally in Rouen and then moved to Antwerp before finally relocating in Amsterdam where he became a member of the *Parnassim* (Slavitt ix). It stands to reason that his text would have been read within these Northern and Western European contexts. There is no ambivalence in this “emplotment” of the Book of Esther and how it is used to represent the community of Portuguese *conversos*.¹⁷ As we move outside of Iberia, and in doing so come into contact with what historians call the first echoes of modernity in these New Jews. A modernity that is both based the new and the old. These highly mobile figures maintained connections across the globe in ways that are comparable to today’s world.

Although the Carvajal women who perished at the hands of the New Spanish Inquisition in 1598 would not have had access to the *Poema de la Reyna Ester* composed three decades before their death, they would have shared many of the sentiments expressed by their fellow *converso* in the diaspora. Delgado likely would have had a shared cultural milieu and even potentially contact with the Carvajal’s sisters’ surviving family members who were able to flee persecution in Italy. They would have shared texts like the *Ferrara Siddur* that would help tell the story of the heroine Queen Esther. Let us now move to the final chapter of this study and see how the Carvajal women utilized the story of Esther as a guiding aspect of their religious practice. Amidst the competing and complementary retellings of this Esther story, we are able to see how crucial aspects of the biblical story are translated into practical accommodations of faith and worship.

¹⁷I return to the idea of “emplotment” as developed by Naomi Seidman. She theorizes translation as a “narrative, read not as a transparent truth but rather as ideologically marked ‘emplotment’”(3).

Sisters in the Law of Moses

In the previous chapters, we have explored how Queen Esther was a key figure for crypto-Jewish and *converso* subjects in the early modern period. In this chapter, we will see how she took on an even more essential role for female practitioners and a unique role within the religious practice of Isabel de Carvajal and her sister Leonor de Carvajal. Esther became the patron saint of crypto-Judaism and like the role that the Virgin Mary held for Christians, Esther provided hope and was considered a model and heroine for crypto-Jews.¹ She was a female savior that could release the crypto-Jewish populace from their oppression. Esther was keenly significant because crypto-Jews were raised as public Catholics and private Jews; they embodied in their everyday practice and lives a dual and plural faith. Crypto-Judaism is a hybrid faith that cannot be divorced into its constituent Catholic and Jewish influences. Figures such as Esther had power precisely because they resonated with both faiths. Under crypto-Judaism, and for the Carvajal women, Esther became Saint Esther in their private letters to each other. Flexibility was crucial to the Carvajals' survival and practice in a world that was hybrid and unaccommodating and Esther shared mechanisms of adaptability for not only survival but ultimately for success. Her figure was employed as a model and her religious practices were adapted and highlighted to become central tenants of the crypto-Jewish faith elaborated within the Carvajal family—the

¹Gitlitz shows that for many *conversos* and crypto-Jews in Iberia, Esther was venerated like a Christian Saint (378).

community of crypto-Jews in Nueva España [New Spain] in the late sixteenth-century and throughout the dynamic Sephardic trade networks that connected crypto-Jews around the globe.

For the Carvajal women, Esther was a resistance figure who risked her own personal safety for the good of the Jewish people. There are many connections between the story of Esther and the reality of Isabel and Leonor's lives. All three women—Esther and the Carvajal sisters lived double lives. They passed as members of dominant culture in Persia or *Nueva España* while living secretly as practicing Jews. In the contemporary *Biblia ladinada*, the vernacular version of the Old Testament compiled in fourteenth-century Spain, Mordechai instructed Esther to not reveal her Jewish origins when arriving at the court: “non rreconto Ester su pueblo e su generaçion que Mordecai mando a ella que non lo rrecontase,” (688)² [Esther did not reveal her people or her lineage because Mordechai told her not to tell] (*my translation*). This message of secrecy parallels the necessary secrecy that crypto-Jews maintained within their communities and daily lives. The Carvajal women took great measures to hide their true religiosity to household members including servants who were not Jewish and took a great many precautions before revealing their identity to other known or potential crypto-Jews.

Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal are two women who I reimagine as leaders of the crypto-Jewish faith in colonial Nueva España.³ Whereas most historians have primarily been interested in one of the sons, Luis de Carvajal, who called himself a martyr in his second Inquisitorial trial and in the autobiography that he wrote in prison, I focus on two of the Carvajal women who were central purveyors of the crypto-Jewish faith in their family and within the crypto-Jewish community of Nueva España. The Carvajal family holds a prominent place in the studies of the crypto-Jewish tradition in the Iberian world. This family of Portuguese *conversos*

²This chapter refers to two contemporary bibles the *Biblia Ladinada* and the *Ferrara Siddur*. The former is based upon a now lost fourteenth-century manuscript composed in Spain and I use Moshe Lazar's Escorial I.J.3 edition. The latter was composed in Ferrara in 1552 for the use of the *converso* population living there. According to Lazar, the *Biblia Ladinada* was an ancestor of the *Ferrara Siddur*. It stands to reason that the Carvajal family or member of their network of crypto-Jews would have had access to these Castilian bibles.

³I first developed this connection in my article that appeared in *e-Humanista* (2015) “Crypto-Jewish Faith and Ritual in *Nueva España*: The Second Inquisitorial *Procesos* of Isabel de Carvajal.”

moved from Iberia to Nueva España in 1569, where they began to develop crypto-Jewish practices. Almost all of the Carvajals residing in Nueva España, including the matriarch, Francisca and her children, Isabel, Luis, Leonor, Mariana, and Catalina, were killed in the auto-de-fé in 1596. Previous studies of this family mainly focus on Luis and his role in the crypto-Jewish faith, which includes Alonso Toro's *La familia Carvajal*, Seymour Liebman's English translation of Luis's autobiography and Martin Cohen's *The Martyr*. However, following these two sisters in the Carvajal family reveals other aspects about crypto-Judaism in Nueva España and specifically about female practice and their role in creating identity that connected the far-flung crypto-Jewish community of the early modern period, i.e., Spain, Amsterdam, Italy, Angola, and the New World. In fact, members of the Carvajal community including Leonor's husband, Manuel de Andrade, was a member of these transnational trade routes.

Due to the absence of a stable patriarchy, the Jewish communities throughout the Sephardic Diaspora encouraged a dominant matriarchy. The opportunities for matriarchy and Carvajals' accommodation to Inquisitorial persecution shaped Isabel's and Leonor's fervent judaizing. On an intimate familial level and among a network of crypto-Jews in Nueva España, Isabel and Leonor, alongside the other women of the Carvajal family created identity within the liminal situation of the colonial Inquisition of Nueva España. More broadly, they also served as a link between the Iberian Peninsula and the colonies.

I analyze the manuscripts from Isabel's and Leonor's second Inquisition trials in 1595–1596 to reveal how crypto-Jewish women construct identity and community. The *Bancroft Library* in Berkeley, California acquired the unedited manuscript copies of these trials in 1995. Although Alonso Toro and Martin Cohen refer to the Carvajal women in their research, few scholars have specifically engaged with these manuscripts. Michelle M. Hamilton has explored the poetic compositions found in Leonor's trial which reflect a deeply personal and learned interaction with crypto-Judaism (2000). My work is the first to treat the material practices that helped define the Carvajal sisters' worship of crypto-Judaism. While labeled as Isabel's and Leonor's trial, like other Inquisition trial manuscripts, only about fifty of the four hundred plus pages come from their personal testimony. The rest is a compilation of testimonies acquired from the trials of their immediate family and other members of the crypto-Jewish community of Nueva España as is standard in many Inquisition trials throughout Iberia and its colonies.

Isabel de Carvajal was born in Portugal and married *converso* Gabriel de Herrera who indoctrinated his wife into the crypto-Jewish religion (Cohen 65). Upon her husband's death in 1580, she moved with her family to the New World. In *Nueva España*, she took turns living with her sister Leonor and family, and also with her mother. As a childless-widow, she was able to live in a way that was dedicated to her faith and also take on the additional role as teacher to the younger children in the family. Leonor de Carvajal moved to *Nueva España* with her merchant husband Jorge de Almeida. Almeida was deeply involved in the transatlantic trade networks that took him away from the New World and Leonor maintained the home and the crypto-Jewish rituals within it.

Given that the Carvajal family's history was deeply entangled with the Inquisition, both in their flight to the New World and their life there, the biblical story of Esther provided the Carvajal women with a salvation story and hope. Isabel and Leonor forge strong connections to both the story, and its heroic female figure. David Gitlitz shows that among different crypto-Jewish populations Esther was recognized as the "historical deliverer of her people" and many *conversos* and crypto-Jews called and venerated her as Saint Esther (378). In a trial of a suspected judaizer in the Canary Islands in 1524, the Inquisitor wrote that "Queen Esther was born for the salvation of many" (378). The other reason that Esther is such a vital figure for this family is because of her gender. Practiced openly and freely, traditional Judaism is a patriarchal religion where men are the arbiters of the religion in their roles as rabbis and cantors. In private however, I follow scholars including Miriam Bodian (2007) and René Levine Melammed (1999) who acknowledge crypto-Judaism as a matriarchal religion. As crypto-Judaism necessitated a shift from the public to private realm, female figures are the central purveyors of the crypto-Jewish faith.

I add new to this idea that Queen Esther is the matriarch of this new hybridized religion; she is both the Abraham of crypto-Judaism and the patron saint of crypto-Judaism. Esther became the matriarch of a genealogy of women who were celebrated as heroines in contexts of persecution. In his letters, Luis invokes biblical feminine figures as models for his sisters. He wrote to Catalina from prison: "Pray, Pray, as Anna and Esther did in danger; hope as did the blessed Judith and Salome" (Liebman 107). These four biblical references address and celebrate the strength of female heroines, who as devout Jewesses use both prayer and fasting to resist adversity. As Yosef Haim Yerushalmi develops in his text

on Jewish historiography, *Zakhor*, what we witness between the biblical figures and the Carvajal women is the collapsing of historical and liturgical time. These women stand as key figures that are relevant for the present realities of late sixteenth-century colonial figures. They are recalled and memorialized through religious worship in order to create personal links and meaningful connections. I focus on Esther's role for this family because of the material practices that the Carvajal sisters developed in order to uphold this particular figure as a model, and these practices are modifications from Esther's own practices as dictated in the biblical story.

As figures of the body and of faith, there are many parallels between Esther, Isabel de Carvajal, and Leonor de Carvajal. Esther is selected as queen because of her body, she was chosen from a group of women for her attractive physical attributes; we read in the *Ferrara Siddur* that she is presented as “moça hermosa de forma y buena de vista,” (148) [a beautiful shaped woman and nice to look at] (*my translation*). Esther also conformed to standards of beauty and femininity—she won a beauty contest and leveraged her influence to save the Jewish people. According to the *Ferrara Siddur* she spent “doze meses, que assi se cumplan dias de sus afeytes; seis meses de mirrha, y sies meses en especias, y en afeytes de las mujeres” (149).⁴ [Twelve months, in which she achieved the requisite days for beauty treatments; six months in myrrh, and sixth months in spices, and in beauty treatments for women] (*my translation*). Her body plays a central role in this biblical story in terms of her selection by the king to be his queen. Esther appeared at court as a beautiful body with a hidden minority identity. Similarly, Isabel, and Leonor used their bodies to secretly practice Jewish rituals and preserve crypto-Jewish faith.

Complying with the notion of female virtue and purity located in her body, virginity was also a requirement stipulated for the women who would appear before the king.⁵ This formulation of Esther parallels the

⁴Similarly we read in the *Biblia Ladinada* “aui a ella seuno la rregla de las mugeres doze meses, que asi se cumplan los dias de sus afeytes, seys meses en el azeite del balsam, e seys meses en las especias e en los afeytes de las mugeres” (688). [In this way she completed the rule for women that within twelve months, they would undergo a number of beauty treatments: six months in balsam oil, and six months in spices and other beauty treatments for women] (*my translation*).

⁵“Todas las virgines” [All the virgins] (*Ferrara Siddur* 149), “Todas las virgenes” [All the virgins] (*Biblia Ladinada* 688).

construction of the virtuous Esther figure that is common throughout all the retellings that we have seen in this study including the tapestries, the *autos*, Lope's Esther, Godínez's two texts and Pinto Delgado's retelling. She is also a figure of faith, found most closely in Pinto Delgado's *La Reyna Ester*, that grows for the *converso* and crypto-Jewish community and this is highlighted by the Carvajal women. The Carvajal women are deeply religious figures and used their gender roles and their bodies in order to further and develop their religious practice. We will see in detail how they employed the Fast of Esther and modified this practice by deepening its intensity. Like Esther, Isabel and Leonor lived within prescribed gender norms of their societies. Unlike Vashti, Esther did not challenge the status quo of women's position in public society. A central difference between these two protagonists of the book of Esther is that Vashti challenged her gender identity in public whereas Esther did not challenge her gender identity, she accommodated her role as a person or statesman to the absolute reign of her husband in public, and sought redress in private.

Esther, Isabel, and Leonor used their bodies and material practices surrounding the body to resist the pointed hardships of their daily lives. At the same time, Esther and the Carvajal sisters used their influence to create meaning and new ways of being an obedient female figure in their respective time periods. They followed the rules that prescribed gender norms in order create a new type of Jewish figure. Many of these practices dealt with their treatment of their own bodies and the use of this controllable space to observe newly defined rituals that defined crypto-Judaism. The concept of the *Sephardic difference* that I develop throughout this book is most clearly seen in the manuscripts of the Carvajal women. Through a religious piety that is hybrid, material and inscribed on the body these women define their own identity and new approaches to understanding crypto-Judaism.

BETWEEN TWO REPUBLICS

The Carvajal women found themselves immersed in the colonial context of the New World once they left Iberia in the later part of the sixteenth-century. In this new space populated by different peoples, they were treated as European subjects. Although *conversos* and crypto-Jews were categorized as part of the Republic of Spaniards, religiously they were considered others. María Elena Martínez theorizes that the self/other dichotomy that divided the Indigenous population from European

settlers was based upon the creation of a Catholic Iberian nation that othured Muslim and Jewish members of its own society. I argue that re-conquest is a continual process of information, the identifying of an “other” and the treatment of this body (whether it be removal or integration) in the peninsula, and then subsequently in the New World. The Carvajal family was part of this process on both sides of the Atlantic and illustrates the formation of identity that in its inception stands outside of the official body politic of its time and location. For Yitzhak Baer the purpose of the Inquisition was to “excise from the body politic a foreign racial element which the Spanish Christians were unable to assimilate” and this project continues beyond the borders of Iberia (43). The fear of contamination by an unknowable other draws significantly upon the identity of the Jew in Iberia. State rhetoric become constructed around dominant themes of anti-foreigner sentiment and shaped policies of restriction. This holds true both in the colonial context whereby *Nueva España* was part of an Iberian Empire that looked to exclude elements that were considered foreign including Jews and Muslims and has contemporary analogs to the current news observer, most notably in the United States and France. Crypto-Jewish members of colonial *Nueva España* further problematized the dichotomous division of Spaniards and Indian as they were both European subjects and Jewish others, in a new territorial context, but one that belonged to and was dominated by the Iberian Empire. We read in Isabel’s trial how they went to church on a regular basis to feign allegiance to the Republic of Spaniards:

después que esta se passo a la ley de Moysén, de españoles a vezes quienes han tenido los sacramentos de la madre iglesia por de ninguno efecto, aunque no ha burlado de ellos, y si confessava y comulgava lo hazía por cumplirlo porque no tenía a Jesucristo autor de ello o por Dios y el altar que tenían su casa esta y las dichas su madre doña Francisca, y hermanas doña Catalina, doña Mariana, doña Leonor y Luis de Carvajal, *era por parascer españoles* y no ser sentidos, pero no porque creyesen en las ymages que en el estaban ni en la ley de nuestro redemptor Jesus Christo. (MSS 95/96 v.4, 334v *emphasis mine*)

after she turned to the Law of Moses, from Spaniards at times [the crypto-Jews] who had taken the sacraments of the Mother Church without any feeling. And although she didn’t make fun of them, and if she confessed and took communion she did so only to obey the rules, because she did not believe that Jesus Christ was their author [of the sacraments], nor did she

believe him to be God. And the altar she and her mother doña Francisca, sisters' doña Catalina, doña Mariana, doña Leonor and Luis de Carvajal had in their home, was there only *it to appear as Spanish subjects* and not to be discovered, but not because they believed in the images they had or in the Law of our redeemer Jesus Christ.⁶ (*translation and emphasis mine*)

In this passage, Isabel clearly makes the distinction, where official rhetoric does not, that she is *other* who does not fit into the dual-classification system of Spaniard or Indian. Isabel in her trial complicates notions of identity and faith. The Carvajal women utilized a hybrid-like system of worship in order to dissimulate religious practices and to trick the public about their crypto-Jewish worship. At the same time, in front of an Inquisitorial Tribunal, she is careful to show that she respected Catholic principles and worship “aunque no ha burlado de ellos [los sacramentos]” [although they did not make fun of the [sacraments]]. The Carvajals’ employed within the home what anthropologist James Scott calls “weapons of the weak” or the everyday forms of resistance that include tactics that the Carvajal women utilized: dissimulation, false compliance, and feigned ignorance.

Officially, those of *converso* extraction were denied access to the colonies, but as we can see from the Carvajal family and the extensive community that they were part of, *conversos* did make it to the New World. We have records not only from the Carvajal and community of judaizers who were simultaneously brought up on Inquisition charges, but by the later community that was wiped out in the auto-de-fé that culminated in what is known as the *Gran complicidad* or the Great Complicity at the beginning of the seventeenth-century. Studying crypto-Jewish families reveals that within the homogenizing discourse promulgated by the Catholic Royals, there were many competing notions of identity for the transatlantic Spanish early modern empire.

Alongside this project of nation and empire building, clear gender-based distinctions were fleshed out amidst conquest (in the New World) and re-conquest (in Iberia). The body stands out as a fundamental component of this empire building project, both in terms of its racial and ethnic identity and its religious and gender identity. The public sphere in which conquistadores could gain land for the crown was strictly

⁶All the English translations from the manuscripts of Isabel and Leonor are my own.

controlled by men and as feminist and cultural critic bell hooks shows “sexuality has always provided gendered metaphors for colonization” (57). The land that was under conquest in the New World became feminized and more men made it there in early days in their role as conquistador and as the colonial project expanded, families began to arrive including the Carvajals.⁷ In this stage of colonization, women, especially among crypto-Jewish families, took on heightened roles in the continuity of religious identity. The Carvajals received permission to relocate in the New World due to the fact that Luis de Carvajal, el Viejo, was the governor of Nueva León. Although not a crypto-Jewish practitioner himself, he brought many members of his family to the New World—both to populate the colonial outposts and help them escape from dire circumstances in Iberia. Today, some credit Luis de Carvajal with the high proportion of peoples with crypto-Jewish ancestry who populated New Mexico and Northern Mexico including León.⁸ It is important to consider the *conversos* made up the founding members of colonial *Nueva España*. Susan Migden Socolow shows that after the initial conquest, “proportionately more Spanish women made it to the New World” and these women “transform settlements into permanent colonies” (53). Although many European colonizers intended to settle and populate the land, the Carvajal family’s male members were constantly moving around due to their participation in transatlantic commercial trade networks. Whereas their husbands travelled abroad and became part of international Sephardic trade routes that connected Angola, Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, and Northern Europe, women conducted the majority of their lives within the home and created religious continuity in this space.⁹ Part of conquest and counter-reformation ideas encouraged the separation of men and women and a developed gender ideology that placed women within the home. Mary Elizabeth Perry helps us to think about the social code that based male honor upon female control: “Enclosure and purity developed as strategies for defending the

⁷According to Susan Migden Socolow “discovery and conquest of America was predominantly a male enterprise, Spanish women did have a limited role in the early settlements” (52).

⁸For more information on the ancestry of these crypto-Jewish communities see Janet Liebman Jacob’s *Hidden Heritage*.

⁹See Jonathan Israel’s *Diaspora within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires (1540–1740)*.

faith at this time, for separating the sacred from the profane and also for protecting the social order” (6). However, as we will see in the example of Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal, crypto-Jewish women reinscribed the home and enclosure with new meanings that create dynamic identity based on assumed female practices. This is a pivotal moment in the colonial period, because it is one of the early examples when women were creating and shaping culture in ways that were not visible on the outside. These practices were not recorded by themselves and could only be celebrated in secrecy, consequently their role in colonial history has been dramatically understudied.

CRYPTO-JEWISH WORSHIP

Isabel and her fellow crypto-Jewish women lived within the boundaries established for women in the early modern world. The Carvajal women do not vocally challenge contemporary gender norms. Instead, they used the space of the home and the body as sites of reaffirmation of Jewish identity and resistance to Church dogma. I follow Michel de Certeau’s characterization that “Many everyday practices...are tactical in character” and crypto-Jewish women strategically used them to preserve their faith (xix).

Esther, Isabel, and Leonor carefully worked within the closed spaces of their living quarters in order to craft policy. Functioning as a stateswoman, Esther used a private dinner party to invite Haman and the king and reveal his evil machinations. We have seen this banquet scene represented in all of the retellings, although it took on a striking role in the tapestries in Chap. 2. Esther did this within her own personal chambers: while Haman and her uncle Mordechai had their confrontations in public, hers occurred behind closed doors. We read in the *Ferrara Siddur* “venga el rey y Haman al combite que fare a ellos” (151). [The king and Haman will come to the banquet that I make for them] (*my translation*). In this way, she followed a code that assigned the closed space of the home to women. Similarly, the Carvajals used their homes to negotiate their religious identity and practice. As a widow, Isabel lived at times with her sister and at times with her mother and used the spaces of the home to host religious gatherings as public spaces were not available to be used for Jewish worship. Religion and politics were tied together as the laws, and figures who oversaw them were religious in nature. This is the case of the Holy Inquisition, as an institution was led by the church

and appointed by the Iberian governmental authorities. Social anthropologist Joëlle Bahloul theorizes the domestic realm as a repository for family memory and in this case crypto-Jewish ritual and tradition. She elaborates: “As we go through the house, memories not only describe physical space but also tell a social history. Domestic space serves as a metaphor for the human entity that inhabits it; domestic space is the space of memory” (10).

Although a formal structure of female worship did not exist, Isabel, her mother and sisters fully internalized and understood their role in the preservation of crypto-Judaism. We can see this in the placement of Catholic images within the home. Their daily lives embodied the notions of living between two-republics. The Carvajal women carefully worked the space of the home to dissipate suspicions surrounding their faith, trying to trick both visitors and servants. Leonor describes that for these purposes they had a Christian altar and her mother had a rosary. She describes the main living space:

Tenía un altar en la sala principal de su cassa han algunas ymagenes a las quales tenia poniéndolos para engañar a los que entraban delante del qual algunas veces se hincaba de rodillas para dar a entender a la gente de su cassa que era española y mi madre tenía un rosario para traer en las manos y llevar a missa la qual jamás rezaba ni se encomendaba a de jesucristo su bendita madre ni los mentos a sino hera para pasaser burla. 64r-v

There was an altar in the main living room of the house that had some images which she put to trick those who entered. Sometimes, she would kneel in front of the images to make it seem to the people in the house that she was Spanish. And my mother had a rosary that she would hold in her hands and bring to Mass although she would never pray with it nor would she entrust herself to Jesus Christ nor his blessed mother, by instead it was used as a disguise.

As we can see in this quotation, *española* refers to the official identity for Christian practitioners condoned by the empire. Doña Francisca’s rosary was used to dissimulate Catholic worship as we read in Isabel’s trial: “si tenían rosarios para llevar a la iglesia pero en cassa nunca jamás rezaban en ellos” (59v-60r): [they did have rosaries to bring to church but at home they never prayed with them] (*my translation*). The Carvajal women played to their strengths; they identified themselves as members of the Spanish Republic because it permitted them to continue their

secret Jewish observance and used faith-objects of this group to dissimulate other types of worship. Once again, they carefully used the private sphere to preserve their faith and “transform the home into a space of resistance” (Perry 2005, 5).

The home also became a meeting place for the family as well as other judaizers including Manuel de Lucena, Justa Méndez and Clara Enríquez: “Preguntada, quanto tiempo passo al aver dormido el viernes que tiene la dicha Justa Mendéz en su casa de esta después de aver quitado los *sambenitos* a las dichas doña Catalina y doña Mariana hermanas de esta” (84r). [She was asked, how much time the said Justa Mendéz slept in their house after the penitential robes were removed from her sisters’ doña Catalina y doña Mariana]. This quotation reveals that within this safe space they could remove the material markers that the Inquisition imposed on their bodies in the *sambenitos* or penitential robes, which made punishment visible for all to see when they were in public. Within this space, Perry argues that women could use the home to protect against public discourse of dominant religions through story telling of cultural heroes. Isabel and Leonor and the other members of the crypto-Jewish network sang songs and told stories about Old Testament figures. For example: “doña Ysabel y doña Mencia un cantico que comienza de esta manera:” [doña Isabel and doña Mencia [sang] a song that began in this way]:

Si con tanto fundado cada día
cantasemos loores al señor
amo el tiene de darnos alegría
y en todas más cosas su favor... 51r

If with such [comfort] founded each day
we sang praises to God
master who gives us happiness
and in other things his favor...

In a Jewish religion void of its official leaders, the traditional Rabbi, women like Isabel take on some of their role, for instance in advising and instructing what does and does not constitute faith. Bonfil describes the role that widowed Rabbis’ wives in Renaissance Italy had, whereby upon their husbands’ deaths they become a type of spiritual leader and community advisor. Isabel’s husband brought her into the fold of crypto-Judaism and upon his death Isabel continues his work of maintaining the Law of Moses within her family—her most immediate community:

Los dezía y rezava el sábado, y como el yba diciendo, esta y sus hermanas doña Ysabel y doña Mariana que los savían de memoria y van respondiendo y su madre de ellos doña Francisca de Carvajal aunque estaba presente y los oya no respondía porque no los savía de memoria, y las si mismo los sábados en honor dellos y alabando al dios el dicho Luis de Carvajal su hermano dezía en copla toda la ley de Moysén y estay los dichas doña Ysabel y doña Mariana sus hermanas yban respondiendo porque también los savían de memoria como los dichos nuevo canticos, y estaba presente así mismo la dicha doña Francisca a su madre que tampoco no respondía por no saberla y comienza de esta manera:

Altísimo dios clamamos
 con voces y alaridos
 por vernos tan afligidos
 atiende a que desmayamos. MSS. 95/96, v. 3, 125v-126v-r

He would recite the prayers and pray on Saturday, and as she would go along saying them. His sisters doña Isabel and doña Mariana who knew them [the songs] by heart would respond, and their mother doña Francisca de Carvajal, although she was present and she could listen to them she would not respond because she did not know them by memory. And they would sing them on Saturdays honoring them, and praising God, the said Luis de Carvajal, her brother, would say all the Law of Moses in verse form. And the said doña Isabel and doña Mariana his sisters would respond because they also knew it by heart like the said new songs, and the said doña Francisca his mother would not respond to these because she didn't know them, beginning in this way:

To God Almighty we cry
 with voices and howls
 for we see ourselves so afflicted
 may he attend to our plight before we lose heart.

Through the performance of songs and prayers, crypto-Jews preserved their faith. One of the prayers found in Isabel's trial includes: "Cantemos con alegría/alavancas al señor, etc." (MSS. 95/96 v. 4, 344r). [Let us sing with happiness/praises of God, etc.]. Hamilton explains: "Los procesos de Leonor e Isabel de Carvajal muestran que las mujeres de la familia sabían de memoria muchísimas composiciones poéticas que se utilizaban en las ceremonias y rituales religiosos familiares" (2000, 78). [The trials of Leonor and Isabel de Carvajal show that the women in

the family knew by heart many poetic compositions that they used in ceremonies and familial religious rituals] (*my translation*). Women transmitted the songs to other family members and members of the larger crypto-Jewish community and Isabel and Leonor sang these songs with their family friends in order to preserve their faith.

The home became Isabel's synagogue. Within this space, she realized the expressions of her faith and became a leader in her family. Isabel in particular stands out as one of the most educated females in her family—a fact Luis acknowledged with the letters he wrote to her while in prison. When Luis was questioned as to why he wrote a note to Isabel in particular he “dixo que porque entiende que es para la dicha doña Isabel, es porque sabe leer, porque las demás no saben leer letra tirada, y que aunque dize en el papel, que se embía a las demás, no save con que fin lo hiziesse porque como dicho tiene no saben leer” (MSS. 95/96, v. 3, 187v). [He said that he understood that it was for the said doña Isabel, it's because she knows how to read, because the rest do not know how to read in rounded script, and although it says on paper, that it was send to the rest, he didn't know with what purpose it would have been done because as he said they did not know how to read].

Isabel's practice was permitted to grow; in part, this is due to her status as a childless widow. Louise Mirrer's suggestion that “widows could devote themselves to God in a way that they could not as married women” stands for Isabel (1992, 1). She arrived in Nueva España already widowed and devoted most of her time there to the crypto-Jewish education of the younger children. She becomes a sort of crypto-Jewish *beata*. Perry describes *beatas* as holy women who could be widows, adolescents, and live together or in family homes according to the ideas of *recogimiento* which expressed an emphasis on internal, spiritual experiences (1990). This emphasis on these internal and spiritual experiences clearly becomes centered on the body for Isabel de Carvajal.

The Carvajal women reinscribed their bodies with their own meanings that helped them in their religious worship. The body is another female-controlled space that stood out for its defiance to patriarchal Catholic order. Living in the penitentiary context of the Inquisition which mobilized the penitentiary elements of Catholicism, Isabel in particular developed penitentiary system of worship as we will see in the following passage. This type of hybrid and petitionary-shaped worship is another crucial aspect of the *Sephardic difference*. Here, Leonor describes the modified penance system that her sister Isabel followed that

consisted of two main ascetic elements: fasting and self-flagellation. We have seen how Godínez explored how fasting operates within the story in his *Comedia de la Reyna Ester*. Like Esther, who gains access to the king through the display of her body, crypto-Jewish women utilized *ayunos* or ritualized fasting to resist dominant Catholic practices.

Dixo que la perdona que dize al testigo, ayunava y hazia todo lo que la preguntada contiene es su hermana de esta dona Ysabel, porque guardava la ley de Moysén con tanta perfección que de los tres años a esta parte que ha volvieron a ella, y antes que las reconciliaba en el dicho este santo oficio, ayunava la dicha dona Ysabel todas las semanas después domingo a medio día llevando esta orden que comía el domingo a medio día, y ayunava hasta el lunes en la noche que çenava y luego ayunava el martes no comían hasta la noche, y luego ayunava el miércoles sin comer vocado hasta el viernes en la noche que era el ayuno de tres días el qual llamava la dicha dona Ysabel el ayuno del traspasso, lo qual hazía por hazer mas penitencia, y del dicho ayuno le empeçó a ayunar la dicha dona Ysabel en contemplación del ayuno de la Reyna Ester, en todos los quales dichos tres días la Reyna Ester no avía comido sino un guevo con çeniza, y el sábado solo no ayunava la dicha dona Ysabel por ser día de fiesta, y luego empeçava el domingo a medio día como esta dicho a continuar sus ayunos, y que la dicha dona Ysabel trae silicio y se acota todos los días que ayuna por guarda de la dicha ley de Moysén. La confesando la que no haga tanta penitencia y que mixe por su salud, respondía que no podía hazer menos porque lo avía prometido así a Dios. 229r-v

She said to excuse what the witness said, she had fasted and did all that she was asked by her sister doña Isabel, because her sister [Isabel] upheld the Law of Moses with such perfection in the three years since she returned to it, and before she was reconciled by the said Holy Office, the said doña Isabel fasted every week from midday Sunday until dinner on Monday, and then she would fast on Tuesday not eating until dinner, and then would fast on Wednesday without eating a bite until Friday night that was the fast of the three days which she called the Fast of Traspasso, which she did for more penitence. The said doña Isabel upheld the fast in contemplation of the fast of Queen Esther, in all of the said three days she had not eaten not even an egg with ash, and on Saturday doña Isabel only did not fast because it was a holiday, and then she began to fast on Sunday at midday like it is said to continue with her fasting, and the said doña Isabel brought a discipline (ciliary) and she would hit herself every day and then fast for the fast to observe the said Law of Moses. She confessed that she had not done as much penitence as she wanted due to health concerns, and she promised to not do less than she had promised God.

Isabel modeled the Law of Moses in juxtaposition with the Law of Christ and imbued it with sacrifice. Isabel's modified penance system includes extended fasting, self-flagellation, and a strong expression that through pain and suffering she could reach God. Another unique aspect of Isabel's worship here is how she describes a direct connection that she has to God through the promise "avía prometido assí a Dios" [In that way she had promised God] appropriating and internalizing the mystics direct religious connection with God. Whereas Christianity and Judaism employ priests and rabbis to serve as intermediaries between practitioners and God, in this modified system, the practitioners themselves including Isabel and Leonor communicate directly with their God. Like the women who replaced the rabbis as spiritual leaders, we can see through Isabel's trial that crypto-Judaism acquired a more personal relationship between God and the individual subject.

As Bynum shows, fasting in the Old Testament is one of the only religious acts that allows women to be models of piety (192). This expression of faith also connects to ascetic practices of priests and Catholic women and especially mystic nuns. The path designated by mystic San Juan de la Cruz in his poem *Noche oscura* is described by Catherine Sweitlicki as "lo místico es la culminación momentánea de todo un proceso ascético que se realiza a lo largo de la vida" (31). As a result, asceticism was the path of mystical worship. Living in the context of colonial *Nueva España*, Isabel was exposed to Catholic models of worship as she attended church regularly. Ritualized denial of food was practiced by female mystics like the key figure, Santa Teresa de la Cruz and her discalced followers. Crypto-Jewish women also adopted other ascetic practices such as the use of hair-shirts to express religious devotion. Crucially, they followed the fast of Esther because as David Gitliz shows that fasting was used primarily because it is harder to punish "abstinence than it was to observe overt celebration of festivals" (351). Although Esther also held a banquet, crypto-Jews connected with the fast that gave her the strength to approach the king to save the Jewish people. We read in the *Ferrara Siddur* how Esther fasted and it became a central moment of her religious devotion:

y dixo Ester por responder a Mordohay ando y ayunta a todos los Judíos los fallados en Susan y ayunad por mi y no comades y no bevades tres dias noche y día; tambien yo y mis moças ayunare assi, y con esto verne el rey; que no como ley, y como me perdi desperdermee. 151

and Esther responded to Mordechai to bring together all the Jews of Shushan and fast for me and don't eat or drink three days night and day; also my maidens and I will fast in that way, and with this I will go see the king; but not by law, and as I got lost, now I will be found. (*my translation*)

Bodian shows that crypto-Jews favored the biblical 3-day fast which is a deviation from rabbinic practice (1997, 10).

Ritualized fasting or *ayunos* is a central aspect that the Carvajal women used to regulate the body. Although the 1-day *ayuno* is part rabbinic practice for Yom Kippur and is associated with penitence, like many other crypto-Jews, the Carvajals go beyond normative fasting observance in order to control both their bodies and their beliefs in the face of religious domination. Isabel reveals the type of fasts in which she participated and the community such fasts helped create:

Ayunado los días grandes del señor, que llaman los judíos días de penitencia, no comiendo hasta la noche salida las estrellas. El primer ayuno de estos ayuno y guarda en compañía de las estas su madre, doña Francisca, y hermana doña Catalina, doña Mariana, y doña Leonor y Luis de Carvajal de este septiembre de que vendrá lo qual todo hizieron por guarda de la ley de Moysén. MSS. 95/96, v. 4, 333r

Fasting the important days of the lord, which the Jews knew as the days of penitence, not eating until the stars came out at night. The first fast of these fasts that she kept in company of her mother, doña Francisca, and her sisters doña Catalina, doña Mariana, and doña Leonor, and Luis de Carvajal, this coming September which they did to keep the Law of Moses.

This quotation shows that a feminine community emerged around the material practice of religious observance through fasting (Obregón 302).¹⁰ Bynum explores the medieval tradition of fasting among Christian women, which sounds very similar to that followed by the Carvajals: “As it had been for the ancient Hebrews, food abstention was an expression of grief and repentance, a plea for deliverance from some

¹⁰Obregón's publication of Luis's trial shows this communitarian aspect. Here is one such example; “en compañía de este y de las dichas su madre, doña Isabel, Mariana y Leonor” (302). [In his company as well as that of her mother, doña Isabel, Mariana and Leonor] (*my translation*).

test or chastisement, a sign of confidence in God's mercy, an intercession and a preparation for meeting God" (35). Thanks to the letters we have between Luis and his sisters and the testimony that Isabel and Leonor give, we know that the family used fasting to commemorate other persecuted groups and to connect with God. Isabel in her trial highlights the communitarian aspect of this fast: "ayunaba en compañía de este por guardar la ley de moysen" (112r). [She fasted in his company in order to keep the Law of Moses]. We also see in Luis's trial a frequent repetition of the fact that the community was involved in maintaining the fasts. All of the participants were women, namely, Francisca, Catalina, Isabel, Leonor, Mariana and sometimes Justa Mendéz (Obregón 302). Silvia Hamui Sutton shows that in the context of early seventeenth-century Nueva España, female crypto-Jews were paid to realize fasts for wealthy male and female judaizers in the same way that penance was achieved via an intermediary in Catholicism. This was done, as in the case with the Carvajal family, because male bodies were scrutinized publicly while travelling for business and women's bodies normally remained within the closed sphere of the home.

The fast in honor of Esther stands out as one of the most important practices realized by women. They prayed to Esther to give them the faith that she had. Leonor describes Isabel's observance: "doña Isabel contemplaron del ayuno de la Reyna Esther en todos los quales de estos tres días la Reyna Esther no había comido" (78r). [Doña Isabel contemplated the fast of Queen Esther on all of the three days in which Queen Esther had not eaten]. This quote from the trial closely follows the biblical version of the Book of Esther found in the *Biblia ladinada*; Esther writes to her uncle Mordechai: "E dixo Ester que rresondiesen a Mordecai: vete, apaña todos los Judíos que se fallaren en Susan, e ayunad por mi; non bien yo, e mis moças, ayunare asi; e estonce entrare al rrey, avn ques contra derecho; e commo me perdi, perder me he. E paso Mordecai, e fizo todo lo que mando a el Ester" (689). [And Esther asks them to tell Mordechai: go, bring together all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast for me; and my maidens and I will fast: and then I will enter to see the king, although it is against the rule of the land; and as I am lost, lost I will be. And Mordechai came, and he did all the Esther commanded] (*my translation*). Crypto-Jewish women in Nueva España carefully followed the fast that Esther outlined. When Isabel observed these fasts, "she prayed to God to make her like these heroines and to give her the grace to continue her fasting" (Cohen 134). By denying the body through fasting, Isabel proved her spiritual devotion.

Given the penitentiary context in which the Carvajal women lived, having already faced one Inquisition trial and always residing either in Iberia or the Iberian colonies, it stands to reason that they would follow the 3-day fast as established out in their source text and not the normative 1-day fast as common for openly practicing Jewish communities. Although she also held banquets, this was something that could be easily spotted by Inquisitors and therefore Isabel and Leonor did not celebrate in this affirmative way. Isabel stands out as a figure strictly dedicated to her faith through personal fasts, the ultimate regulation of the body; according to Luis “su hermana doña Ysabel no solo los días de ayuno pero otros días ayunaba y hazía tanta penitencia que comía en todo el día ni la noche y se ponía la messa a comer con este y su madre y hermanas hazía que comía” (112r).¹¹ [His sister doña Isabel not only fasted on fasting days but on other days she would fast and do so much penitence, she would not eat the whole day nor evening and she would sit at the table with her mother and her sister and pretend she was eating]. Isabel would sometimes fast for 3 days at a time (Adler 46).¹² We read in the trial:

La dicha doña Ysabel todas las semanas, ayunado el domingo hasta día llenado este orden que comía el domingo a medio día y ayunava hasta el lunes en la noche que çenaba y luego ayunaba el martes no comiendo hasta la noche y luego ayunava el miércoles sin comer bocado hasta el viernes en el anoche que era ayuna de tres días el qual llamava la dicha doña Ysabel. El ayuno del tres el qual había por haber mucha penitencia y el dicho ayuno un peso a ayunar la dicha doña Ysabel en contemplación del ayuno de la Reyna Ester en todos los quales dichos tres días la Reyna Ester no avía comida sino un huebo con ceniça. 263r

The said doña Isabel every week, would fast from Sunday until dawn [and] fulfilling this command, she ate on Sunday at midday and [then] she would fast until Monday evening, when she would have dinner and then she would fast on Tuesday not eating until evening and then she would

¹¹We can see throughout the text multiple instances where Isabel identifies herself and is identified by others by this gesture of self-denial; “no se acuerda quantos ayunos esta dos días a veces sin comer vocado ni beber” (334r). [She didn’t remember how two day fasts she did sometimes where went without eating a bite or drinking]. Isabel “no quiso subir a comer” (366v). [She did not want to come up to eat].

¹²Adler references that the Fast of Queen Esther is 3 days and Mariana observed them for “purposes of penance” (46).

fast on Wednesday not eating anything until Friday night and then she would fast for three days to do much penitence, and the said fast did doña Isabel observe in honor of Queen Esther's fast. Remembering those three days in which Queen Esther had not eaten anything but one egg with ashes.

Earlier we have seen communitarian aspects of the crypto-Jewish faith; in this passage, we see that Isabel stands out as a figure strictly dedicated to her faith through personal fasts—the ultimate regulation of the body. The trial manuscripts state: “Doña Isabel no solo los días de ayunos pero otros días ayunaba y hacía tanta penitencia que comía en todo el día y muchas veces dos días haber sin comer todo el día ni la noche...” (112r). [Doña Isabel would not only fast on the required fasting days, but on other days too, and she would do so much penitence that she would not eat all day and many times would go for two days without eating all day and night]. Isabel would sometimes fast for 3 days at a time (112r).¹³

Edward Glaser connects the holiday surrounding Esther to the trials that the Carvajals faced. He explains that crypto-Jews “use Esther’s figure because the feast that was to be celebrated with Haman turns into a trial” (27). Haman’s trial parallels the Inquisition trials that the Carvajals confronted and in the face of this hardship the crypto-Jews primarily recognized Purim through fasting and not feasting. Eva Alexandra Uchmany shows that “doña Francisca y sus hijas Isabel y Mariana Nunez estaban absolutamente conscientes que retaban a la muerte” referring to the danger of continuing their crypto-practices (1992, 66). [Doña Francisca and her daughters Isabel and Mariana Nunez were absolutely conscious that they were challenging death] (*my translation*). Isabel and the other Carvajal women acted like martyrs; knowing full well that their practices were punishable by death, they still continued the performances of their faith. Like Esther, who faced the possibility of death by revealing her Jewish origins to her husband, the Carvajal women continued practicing crypto-Judaism facing the very real possibility of death. Miriam Bodian explores male martyrdom in the crypto-Jewish world through figures such as Luis de Carvajal and Maldonaldo da Silva in Peru, who wrote texts claiming their martyrological status (2007). Female martyrdom has not yet been explored because women did not claim this status

¹³Cyrus Adler explains that the Fast of Queen Esther lasts for 3 days and Mariana observed them for “purposes of penance” (46).

for themselves through writing. However, through the practices that they inscribed upon their bodies, they did in fact make great personal sacrifice.

Women like Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal maintained many aspects of crypto-Jewish culture and religiosity in sixteenth-century Nueva España. Inquisition manuscripts reveal that crypto-Jewish cultural and textual traditions are very different from those of the church. These traditions became constructions of female power and Esther stands out as a key figure in this crypto-Jewish practice. Queen Esther was recuperated as a female savior for the Jewish people, and the Carvajal women observed these elements through many practical accommodations in their everyday lives. Esther and Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal stand out as figures of the flesh who utilized this most private and intimate space to resist hegemonic rule in two different contexts. When describing the mystic body, Elizabeth Teresa Howe writes: “the individual body is its own mundo pequeño, so, too, is the social body a reflection of a mundo más grande or scale of being lead to God as creator” (151). Through their bodies and the bodily practices that they performed, one can read the world that she as a crypto-Jew lived in. Connecting to Queen Esther, a figure presented to the court as a body that turned into the savior of the Jewish people, Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal also used their bodies to maintain their faith. Both are resistance figures that give strength to the legacy of Jewish heroines and reinforce each other today.

As we have seen, the material practices stand out as central elements of religious and cultural worship for the Carvajal women. Today, the descendants of crypto-Jewish families in New Mexico (US), the Chuetas of Mallorca (Spain) and Belmonte (Portugal) have maintained traditions throughout the generations including a separate knife to cut meat from cheese.¹⁴ In many cases, the stories behind these traditions are lost, but the material practice remains. The Chuetas were believed to be

¹⁴For more information on the Crypto-Jewish community in New Mexico, see Janet Liebman Jacobs’ *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*. Another modern case that reflects secrecy and fear of discovery is the Jewish community of Belmonte, Portugal. This community lived isolated in the mountains of northern Portugal and believed themselves to be the only surviving Jews, until they were “discovered” by anthropologist Samuel Schwartz in the 1920s. They were also fearful and reluctant to reveal their religious identity, which was kept hidden for so many years. Today this community has a synagogue, but secret Jews from surrounding towns are only revealed as Jewish upon funerary rites, which occur in the Jewish cemetery.

descended from 15 families that until the mid-twentieth century intermarried and were discriminated against.¹⁵ Portraits of these 15 ancestral families were hung in the church representing the families in their *sambenitos* and reminding the descendants of their hardships and brutal demise (Bodian 1997, 140). In Belmonte, the crypto-Jewish community, that remained secret until the early twentieth century, hung pictures of Esther and referred to her as Saint Esther and Holy Queen Esther (144). Many times these material practices develop out of a context of secrecy and fear, that accompanies and even stronger desire to keep faith traditions within the domestic sphere. Women have been shown to be the heroines of the crypto-Jewish faith and under these matriarchs guidance that crypto-Jewish ritual survived over generations. Esther remains today a survival figure to celebrate. In the figures of Esther, Isabel, and Leonor de Carvajal, individual figures that stand as heroines within a larger community of religious practitioners. It is through this web of relationships that the importance of this hybrid faith stands out over time. Gitlitz shows that for *conversos* “both Judaism/Christianity [are] valid approaches to God...These approaches contrasted with the majority of society’s exclusivist views” (118). In a time, as we have seen, where religious difference led to severe punishment and death, these voices challenged homogenous approaches to citizenship. The *Sephardic difference* furthers this idea and locates the primary heroine and symbol of difference within the female figure. Esther gave crypto-Jews around the globe a common story that they could retell and materially connect with their Jewish identity in a way that clearly related to their present realities.

¹⁵Miquel Segura Aguiló in his text *Raíces Chuetas, alas Judías* tells the story of his *Chueta* family and life in Mallorca. Most scholars agree that by the nineteenth-century crypto-Jewish practice, except in specific rituals, had died out on the peninsula and in colonies.

Conclusion

Throughout this book, I have explored different Castilian retellings of the book of Esther in the early modern period. These many retellings were composed in Iberia by Christians and *conversos* and by ‘New Jews’ and crypto-Jews in the Sephardic Diaspora. Just as the identifiers that label these figures are fuzzy, so too are the texts that reveal their religious beliefs, traditions, and worldly concerns. These works do not express monolithic perspectives but instead reflect the very real tensions in the daily lives of Sephardic Jews and their individual negotiations of identity in a changing world. We can see these ideas in quintessential Iberian products like the *autos sacramentales* in Chap. 1 and through the *comedias* by Lope de Vega and *converso* priest Felipe Godínez as he grapples with his identity in Chap. 3.

In this project, we have traced the Esther story from its biblical roots to its retelling in Italy in Castilian in the *Ferrara Siddur* to Iberia, Flanders, Amsterdam and the New World. The affinities such varied parts of the world has for the Esther story attests to her widespread appeal and significance. I have argued that is precisely through stories such as these that *converso* Jews maintained networks and created continuity throughout the early modern period. The maintenance of this continuity also fashions a new identity: I put forward the idea of the *Sephardic difference* located in the female figure of Queen Esther. I have shown how different aspects of nationhood, empire, and self-fashioning were projected and inscribed upon her body. The qualities of female virtue, religious piety, and the practical accommodations that *conversos* and crypto-Jews

engaged in, make sense of their hybrid identities allow Esther to stand as a foundational figure for *conversos* throughout the diaspora.

The historical context that gave birth to these texts cannot be divorced from their meaning. The mass baptisms in 1391 and the subsequent expulsion in 1492 of the Jews gave rise to the Sephardic Diaspora that altered the lives of many such as João Pinto Delgado in Chap. 4 and the Carvajal sisters in Chap. 5. Gil Andijar encourages us to think beyond the purely rupture model that 1492 typically presents and instead considers the new possibilities presented at this moment. The Castilian language played a crucial part in connecting this community through far-flung geographical and temporal locations. Due to its status as a dominant world language through its colonial enterprises and the concurrent literary trends of the Spanish Golden Age, Castilian Spanish became something new and different in the hands of *converso* Jews in the early modern Sephardic Diaspora. It was both an intimate and native tongue, the language of prayer and daily communication and the language that *conversos* and Sephardic Jews used to compose their poetical and literary treatises. As shown, a notable number of these works were dedicated to Esther.

Esther is a relatable figure because she is a Jewish heroine—a minority woman. Common to all texts is the way that she participates in multiple environments simultaneously. She, like the figures that she resonates with, is dynamic and mobile. She leaves her home to relocate in a courtly setting that in many instances is hostile and always unfamiliar. In the biblical account, Esther spends 6 months preparing for this change through an immersion in a total feminine environment—this preparatory period before ascending the throne parallels the religious and practical accommodations that the Sephardic Jews made in their new environments. Gender identity is a central part of my analysis because it is through this non-dominant perspective that we are able to clearly see how mechanisms of power and control functioned in early modern society. This positionality, or the *Sephardic difference*, alerts the reader to resistance measures that are both large and small, as we saw in the material practices of the Carvajal women in Chap. 5. We also saw how the Esther story was used to maintain the status quo in the tapestries in Chap. 2; however, in addressing the superiority of the king, we have been made to think about the dominant power structures that were in play in the early modern world.

The stories about Esther do not end here. After the period treated in this book, there continued to be retellings and dramatic interpretations of the Esther story in many languages. Two centuries later *conversa* Jew, Grace Aguilar, composed a genealogy of Jewish women in *The Vale of Cedars* in 1816 London, maintaining the importance of the diaspora and the role that exile played for the Sephardic community. Most of the written texts that we have access to have been composed by men, yet women play a vital role in the continuance of the Jewish religion in the diaspora. As we have seen, it is through the traditions that they maintained in the home and the oral traditions that they passed onto their children that we are able to explore the narrative of Sephardic Jewish identity in the early modern period. Although less accessible and harder to find, the work to uncover the voices of *conversa* and Sephardic women throughout the diaspora is centrally important.

Today a multicultural past in Iberia is acknowledged widely among scholars. Many conferences and publications came out of the quincennial celebrations of the discovery of the Americas in 1992, and scholarship promoting a Jewish and Muslim past became reinvigorated at that point.¹ Contemporary Spanish society is uniquely interested in *conversos'* role in Iberian life. However, much work is left undone and *conversos'* role in early modern Iberian and colonial society is being fleshed out and the voices of *conversas* are still being uncovered. Today, many individuals are personally motivated by discovering their own *converso* ancestry, and in 2015 thanks to the “Ley de concesión de nacionalidad a sefardíes-origenarios de España” [The Right of Nationality to the Sephardim Originating from Spain], those Jews with Sephardic ancestry can gain Spanish citizenship without a residency period.

The Esther story continues to be a crucial story for the Jewish people. Every year, many little girls throughout the world don Esther costumes in their celebrations of Purim. Like the early modern women who saw public models of royalty in Isabel la Católica and Catholic models of saints, nuns, and the Virgin Mary, Esther was their alternative, their Jewish Queen and heroine that they aspired to be like both in her physical beauty and in her interior strength. Like Esther, they aspire to resist adversity, survive and flourish.

¹One such text that was written for the quincennial includes José Antonio Lisboa's *Retorno a Sefarad: La política de España hacia sus judíos en el siglo XX*.

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