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Abstract

Calderón's Mimetic *Deseo*: Personified Desire in the *Auto Sacramental* of Baroque Spain

Written to educate the population in Catholic doctrine on the feast of Corpus Christi, the allegorical *auto sacramental* drama depicts the detrimental aspects of mimetic desire in Spanish Baroque society. 17th-century Spanish religious commentators point to moral degeneration and violence as the result of 'inordinate aspirations' stemming from the cross-strata desire to imitate the Other and to acquire material goods. In the midst of the moral and socio-economic crises of the declining Spanish empire, the *auto sacramental* serves as both model and remedy to society's plague of violence. It is during these cultural catastrophes that the *auto sacramental* genre by Calderón de la Barca attains the height of popularity with *Tu prójimo como a ti* (*Love Your Neighbor As Yourself*) from 1674, as one of his most frequently performed dramas. The personification of desire as *Deseo* in *Tu prójimo como a ti* illustrates the mimetic nature of desire according to René Girard's mimetic theory, as well as its transformation into rivalistic violence affecting both the individual and the collective character of Humanity. By portraying both the crisis and conversion of *Deseo*, *Tu prójimo como a ti* enables the spectators' contemplation of both the cause and remedy of mimetic conflict. The character of *Deseo* reiterates the imperative to guide the spectator in choosing the correct model to imitate in order to prevent the violent transformation of desire into mimetic rivalry. Seeking to address desire as the source of social and spiritual violence and promote a reconciliatory solution, Calderón's remedy imparts a cathartic quality to the *auto sacramental* through the saving force of love and forgiveness modeled by the imitation of Christ.

Christa Bucklin is a doctoral candidate in Spanish at the University of Connecticut. Her area of study is Golden Age Literature, with a special concentration on religious theater and interdisciplinary studies. She is currently completing her dissertation entitled, "*Desire, Violence and Peace: The Calderonian Auto Sacramental as Cathartic Remedy in Baroque Spain.*"