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978-0-521-12117-0 - The Mind and Art of Calderon: Essays on the Comedias

Alexander A. Parker

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The mind and art of Calderón

Don Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–81) was, with Lope de Vega, the greatest exponent of the Spanish Golden Age drama. Professor Parker's essays, nine of them previously unpublished and the remaining sixteen substantially revised, are the fruits of a highly distinguished career spanning forty-five years. They provide a wide-ranging survey of Calderón's secular, three-act plays (*comedias*) through detailed analyses of individual works. The themes found in the plays are studied in relation to the background of ideas in seventeenth-century Spain and to the development of Calderón's own view of the intellectual life and the social, ethical and moral problems of this age.

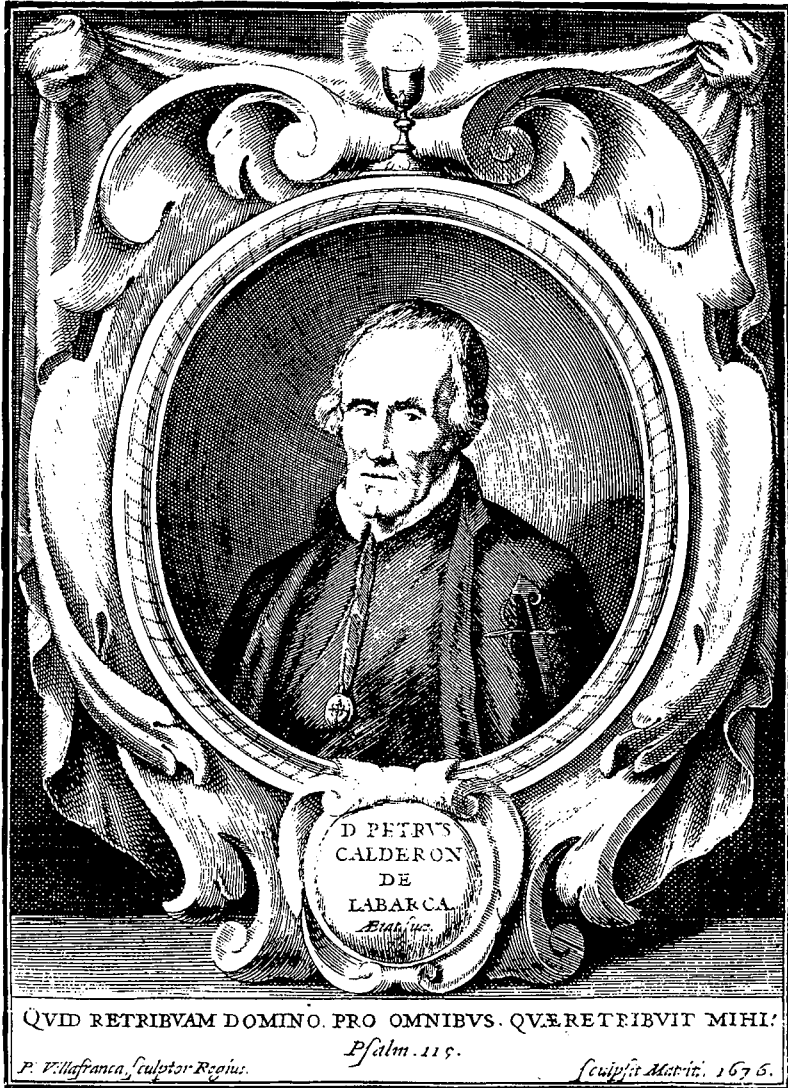
From the tensions of Calderón's early family life and his intellectual struggle with the associated problems, the book passes to the wider tensions in the social and political life of his time, and concludes with a demonstration of how Calderón raises all these human problems onto a wide 'philosophical' level through his use of myths and symbols.

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Portrait of Calderón from the 1677 edition of the *Autos sacramentales*, reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

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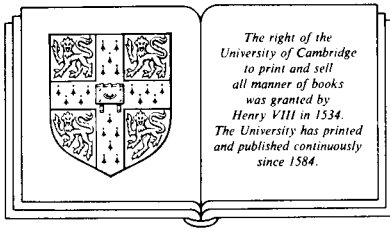
The mind and art of Calderón

Essays on the *Comedias*

ALEXANDER A. PARKER

*Professor Emeritus of the University of Texas at Austin and
Honorary Fellow of the Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge*

Edited by Deborah Kong



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O degli altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami il lungo studio e'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

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Author's preface

My professional activity as a teacher covered the literature of the Spanish Golden Age and was spread over forty-five years from 1933 until my retirement in 1978. Calderón figured more prominently than any other Golden Age writer in my publications, beginning with my first book in 1943. Never my exclusive interest, he always remained the dominant one. It was my intention to dedicate the leisure that retirement would bring me to rounding off my critical interpretation of his drama by completing my study of his *comedias*, or plays for the public and palace theatres.

Rapidly deteriorating eyesight, however, left me within three years unable to read or write. Shortly before my retirement I announced my intention of writing a book with the title that the present one bears, and was granted a fellowship by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation of New York for the furtherance of this project. Overtaken by partial blindness, I thought this could never be fulfilled, but when I found that I could complete another unfinished book that I had on the stocks by means of dictation and the help of readers, I realised that I had perhaps been too pessimistic. Nonetheless, the project I had had in mind seemed too vast to attempt in that way.

I saw a possible way out of my difficulty when the Cambridge University Press offered to publish my collected papers on Calderón, if I could find a suitable editor. I proposed adding to these some unpublished papers, working up some new topics from lecture notes, and rearranging the whole of this material in such a way as to cover a general survey of Calderón's development as a dramatist from first to last. The present book republishes all my Calderonian papers except two (on *El mágico prodigioso*, to be republished soon). They have been revised, in some cases with extensive additions, and with the new material have been placed in a consistent and, I hope, coherent context. The new material can be distinguished by the absence of a note referring to previous publication. Not all the plays here studied are those I would have selected had circumstances permitted, but I hope the selection is sufficiently representative of the dramatist's work.

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This book has a further and more serious limitation in that my acquaintance with the work done on Calderón stops virtually around the centenary year of 1981, which saw so many new publications. It would have been impossible to attempt to keep abreast of developments. I therefore decided to make this book one man's view of Calderón evolved over a lifetime of teaching. The new material that has been added is based for the most part on notes that have been re-read to me. In order to fill in some gaps in the general survey I had some plays put on tapes and have incorporated my thoughts on these. I hope that those who have written on Calderón in recent years will not take my silence about their judgements on him to mean that I would not respect or value these judgements could I read them. This limitation also means that I have for the most part not tried to become familiar with new critical methods or new approaches to literature in general. Such development as there may be in my general approach to literature and my particular approach to Calderón will be development of the principles formed when I began to write, expanded as my experience of literature grew. To one man more than any other I owe my 'training'. He was never formally my teacher, nor was he even a Hispanist. Primarily a specialist in English literature, he was, when I first knew him, loosely attached to the *Scrutiny* group of English scholars and critics. He became Professor of English at the University of Fribourg and later worked for the British Council. He was the most brilliant linguist and had the widest literary culture and the finest critical mind that I have ever come into contact with. He was James Smith, and at the end of my career as a literary historian and critic I wish to place on record this tribute to his memory.

I am indebted to a number of people for help in the preparation of this book. First and foremost, I must express my gratitude to Michael Black and the Cambridge University Press for their interest in my work, it never having occurred to me that my Calderonian essays might be reprinted.

Very special thanks are also due to my editor, Deborah Kong, who after completing her Doctorate willingly agreed to undertake this task despite having in the meantime assumed the duties of wife and mother. My thanks must include her husband Leslie, who uncomplainingly looked after two small children while his wife came to help me at hours when all work is normally completed. Her work has consisted not only in rearranging and adding to published material but also in taking down new chapters from dictation. I have constantly strained her forbearance by demanding changes in work already done, insertions here, and deletions there, through all of which she not only found her way, but kept me on the right lines. I owe much also to her comments and suggestions.

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From the moment I became unable to read and write my greatest support has been my friend and neighbour Denis Aliaga Kelly. He has read to me in English and Spanish, of which he has an excellent knowledge, and I dictated to him and he took down my notes on what he read. Another friend of long standing, William Cunningham, has read to me in French and German and also helped me to formulate notes on these readings. Frances Dorward gave me invaluable help by recording some of Calderón's plays on tape.

Francisco García Sarriá of Edinburgh University has also given invaluable help by obtaining books for me from libraries, as well as photostat copies of articles in periodicals.

Very special gratitude is due to Don Cruickshank of University College, Dublin. His Calderonian erudition has been freely placed at my disposal. No enquiry was ever too much trouble to be answered by return of post, often at length. James S. Cummins of University College London, is someone who also freely answered all my requests for help. Jennifer Lowe, of Edinburgh University, has done the same; all three of these friends willingly supplied me with photostat copies of research material. Where I have received help on a particular point this is acknowledged in the text.

A special debt of gratitude is due to Elaine Edgar, who uncomplainingly undertook the task of typing and carried it out so skilfully.

Though this book has serious limitations the help I have received from all these friends has been unlimited. I am more grateful to them than I can say.

January 1987

A. A. Parker

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Editor's preface

In the writing and editing of this book we have acted upon certain suggestions made to us by Mr Michael Black of the Cambridge University Press. These suggestions were made in order that the book could appeal to a wider audience than a specialist one; so that anyone (for example, a student of European literature) with an interest in Calderón but with little or no knowledge of the Spanish language may read the book without being handicapped in any way.

The guidelines are as follows. Articles which were originally in Spanish have been translated into English. A note at the beginning of the relevant chapter notes indicates where this has been done. All quotations from secondary sources other than English ones have been translated without the original but with the reference given so that the reader may go to the source if he wishes. All titles of plays when first mentioned and citations of Calderón himself have been given first in Spanish and then paraphrased in English. The Spanish spelling, for the sake of consistency in the book, has been modernised where necessary; where this has been done, reference has been made to it.

A similar approach has been adopted with regard to the plays themselves and their context, so that people who did not have a chance to acquire this background knowledge should not be at a disadvantage. Therefore, the Introduction deals not only with a biographical outline of Calderón, but also with information about the types of play to be found in seventeenth-century Spain and their staging. In the body of the book the background to historical plays has often been outlined and a previous knowledge of history – of Henry VIII's break with the Church of Rome, and the Portuguese wars in North Africa, to take two examples – has not been taken for granted. This knowledge of history, as becomes clear in the book, is necessary to the interpretation of Calderón's historical plays. Similarly, the plots of some plays have been outlined where a knowledge of the plot is essential to the understanding of the arguments put forward in this book.

Finally, a note on the editions of Calderón's plays used here. It was obviously advisable that references to a single edition of Calderón's

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complete works should be given after each quotation in the text. The Aguilar edition in three volumes, edited by Ángel Valbuena Briones (vol. I, *Dramas*, vol. II, *Comedias*) and Ángel Valbuena Prat (vol. III, *Autos sacramentales*) is the one most widely used; but a problem arises here, which is that each new printing of this edition brings about a change in pagination. It was therefore decided to go back to the complete works in the *Biblioteca de autores españoles (BAE)* series, edited by Juan Hartzenbusch, 4 volumes, Madrid, and this is the edition referred to second after each quotation in square brackets. The reference given first in round brackets is, in most cases, to the edition used in the original article. References to the *autos sacramentales*, which are not included in the BAE edition, are to the Aguilar edition. There are occasional textual differences between the two references; where the differences are great, the reader's attention is drawn to them.

We have tried to implement these guidelines in such a way as to be truly useful to the non-Hispanist reader, feeling that we are justified in doing so for the sake both of widening the book's appeal and of introducing consistency in the form of the book. We trust that the expert will not find the additions too intrusive.

March 1987

D. A. Kong