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978-0-521-12160-6 - Calderon in the German Lands and the Low Countries: His Reception and Influence, 1654-1980

Henry W. Sullivan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

This book studies the diffusion of the works of the Spanish playwright, Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–81) in Germany and the German-speaking lands, from the dramatist's lifetime to the present day; it also inquires into the causes of Calderón's enduring popularity in that culture. Such an account must consider Calderón's reception on the German stage in the broadest sense: this involves not only the indispensable survey of Calderonian translations, and verse or prose adaptations for the theater, but also an examination of the impact of Calderón's plays on German theories of dramatic art and poetry, philosophy, aesthetics and even politics; Romantic experiments with the staging of Calderón's works, the use of Calderón's plays as the raw material of opera libretti in German, and his influence on the musical stage in general. Since German performances of Calderón have sometimes called for incidental music, Calderón's importance to German opera and music is larger than might be thought.

Since he was essentially a European writer, not merely a Spanish one, Calderón's posthumous critical fortunes have always been an accurate reflection of changes in popular taste and the criteria of criticism throughout Europe. So this history in some measure encapsulates European thinking about the theory of drama since the Renaissance. But the study of Calderón's reception must also take account of the specific historical circumstances surrounding his cultural transformation: local, social, political and religious factors that give the transformation its meaning. A deliberate balance must be sought between a purely objective recording of the extant reworkings of Calderón and the deeper implications for German poetic theory, aesthetics and literary criticism.

An essential part of the history of Calderón's prolonged diffusion in Germany is the retracing of the precise route by which his plays were transmitted. The first direct translations of Calderón into German

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[More information](#)

## CALDERÓN IN THE GERMAN LANDS

were not published until 1803. In the preceding century and a half, Calderón's plays came indirectly into the language via Holland, France and Italy. Certain plays reached Germany only after passing through one language after another (e.g. from Spanish to French, to Dutch, to German; from Spanish to French, to Italian, to German; from Spanish to Italian, to German; from Spanish to French, to German). This process of continuous reworking through several languages usually meant that it was not realized that it was Calderón who wrote many of the plays in the repertoires of the *Wandertruppen* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even in the more sophisticated, fixed-theater performances in the late eighteenth century, the play was generally attributed to the last writer to rework the material of Calderón's original. In the early nineteenth century, Calderón, suddenly known in his own right for the first time and hailed by the Romantics as a universal dramatic genius, was performed throughout Germany with great success. This prolonged, initially anonymous and later public, success of Calderón on the German stage (as drama and also as opera) is very striking, and suggests that his work must have some universal and permanent value beyond his own age and culture, which we must now assess more adequately than we have yet done. The intention of this book, therefore, is to arrive at a deeper understanding and appreciation of Calderón's achievement by examining his reception outside his own cultural context.

The religious schisms of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation meant that Calderón, one of the least accessible of all great dramatists if his cultural background is ignored, was likely to be misunderstood. It could scarcely have been otherwise with this playwright, who represented the culmination of a great Spanish, Catholic, theocratically oriented and backward-looking tradition that had largely faded into memory in the rest of Europe by the year of his death in 1681. By then, northern Europe was confirmed in its Protestantism, political systems sundering Church from State had begun to arise, experimental science and empirical observation had undermined Aristotelian cosmology; and pre-Enlightenment rationalism, belief in progress and the perfectibility of man were soon to supplant the shattered medieval world-view of a finite and static universe with God at its center. It was primarily the (in enlightened eyes) outmoded, explicitly neo-Thomist conception of the universe, so carefully dramatized by Calderón, that was the stumbling-block to his wider acceptance as tragedian and serious dramatist.

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[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The evidence for this is provided by Calderón's early reception in Europe. Apart from Molière, who was usually acknowledged as the author of the original being translated, Calderón was the most widely performed of all European dramatists in the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earliest known translation was as early as 1641 or 1642, when Antoine le Métel d'Ouille published his translation of Calderón's comedy *La dama duende* as *L'Esprit follet* in Paris, six years after its appearance in print in Spain (1636), and only thirteen years after the year of its composition (1629). The joyful ransacking of Calderón's works that ensued in France, and then in the rest of Europe, was by no means indiscriminate. With a few significant exceptions, the successful plays were *always* the comedies. The tragedies and serious dramas found imitators only in Catholic Italy (Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, Carlo Gozzi); they had an occasional performance at the Catholic courts of the Austrian Habsburgs in the original Spanish (*Darlo todo y no dar nada*, *El gran duque de Gandía*), and they attracted the occasional Flemish translator in the Catholic Southern Netherlands (Antonio Francisco Wouters). Of the hundreds of versions and editions of Calderón produced elsewhere throughout Europe in all foreign languages up to the year 1799, the overwhelming bulk of material is comic, secular, and without sectarian affiliation. The serious dramas had to wait until the Romantic revival in Germany for critical attention and performance of any kind. Calderón's Eucharistic *autos sacramentales* were mentioned outside Spain, if at all, only in order that their peculiarities could be criticized; they had to wait until Eichendorff and Father Lorinser for translation, and until the early twentieth century for regular performance. Through the efforts of the Munich Calderón Society (1906–19) and the vogue for *El gran teatro del mundo* in various German versions for the stage in the 1920s, the *autos* now receive regular, uncommercial productions in German at Einsiedeln in Catholic Switzerland.

Evidently, while Calderón's Catholicism created no barrier to the acceptance and success of his secular comedies of intrigue, it long prevented serious consideration of the tragedies, hagiographical plays (*comedias de santos*), and the allegorical one-act plays written to celebrate the Eucharist on Corpus Christi day (*autos sacramentales*): those plays, in short, consciously conceived in Catholic terms and advancing a polemical interpretation of man's situation and his relationship with God. To put it another way, where Calderón's religion did not obtrude, his plays became international successes; where it did, the

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[More information](#)

## CALDERÓN IN THE GERMAN LANDS

plays were largely ignored. The religious schism of Europe created an effective barrier to Calderón's acceptance in the North that was dismantled (and then only with partial success) only by A. W. Schlegel's Viennese Lectures (1808–9), and by Romantic performances of *El príncipe constante*, *La devoción de la cruz*, *El mágico prodigioso*, and the ever popular *La vida es sueño* in versions that conveyed its philosophical profundity for the first time.

But even the early translation and adaptation of Calderón's comedies was not always an easy matter. Calderón's whole view of man and society lay as surely beneath the surface of the comedies as on the surface of the tragedies. Moreover, he brought to the social world of his comedy not only a pronounced Spanish atmosphere, but also the deeper, essential features of the Spanish tradition of which we spoke above. As seventeenth-century Spain lost her political hegemony in a changing world, so the values and idiom of Calderón's theater – theocentric, monarchic, honor-bound and resplendently Baroque – necessarily became more 'foreign' to foreign audiences. Translation in the conventional sense of the word could no longer 'translate' Calderón at all, because the French, Dutch, English and German audiences of succeeding generations presupposed different things about the nature of their world. The special features of the Baroque theater in Spain, and especially Calderón's ornate language and his use of stock conventions (e.g. the role of the clown or *gracioso*, the Castilian honor code, Spaniards' blind submission to the sovereign); the element of the miraculous; stylizations of human behavior and affect that were psychologically 'true' in essence, but not to be accepted literally as a part of life: all these collided with the sensibilities of an increasingly modern, rationalist, utilitarian world which came to view man as the measure of all things. On aesthetic grounds, the pressures of neo-Classical precept drove French, Dutch and German playwrights to attempt the rendering of Calderón, sometimes well, sometimes grotesquely, along lines more in conformity with the three Unities. When one considers the variety of obstacles which beset Calderón's idiosyncratic drama and its acceptance by the modern world, the fact of his popularity all over Europe, both during his lifetime and for a century and a half after his death, is a startling testimony to his genius. Rehashed, imitated, translated over and over again almost beyond recognition, the spark of genius that created the original, immortal dramatic situation was never quite extinguished.

Yet non-comprehension of Calderón could be as much a creative

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[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

inspiration to playwrights abroad as an obstacle. To audiences who applauded Calderón outside Spain, the ways in which a *refundidor* or a particular culture misunderstood Calderón's intentions were not necessarily a negative thing. The unadaptable or incomprehensible elements in the dramas could and did lead to novel and inventive artistic solutions that were of the times and for the audiences of the new playwright. The value of these reworkings to us as modern critics is beyond calculation. What the European refashioners of Calderón included or left out in their own versions (even at third or fourth hand) constitutes a measure of evaluation or criticism of Calderón. The reworked dramas reflect the tastes and conditions of the receptive host society and the individual gifts of the new dramatist as writer and adaptor; they also furnish implicit commentary on Calderón himself. We should not automatically regard the adaptation of the Spanish play by a later dramatist as a servile plagiarism lacking literary worth, nor should the text's self-evident instructive value as a focus of posthumous reaction to the dead author require elaborate proof and demonstration. For the purposes of the history of his reception, the recast play, reflecting a new social and literary milieu, can calibrate and fix the evolution of German culture (the main concern of this book), while adding depth to the running commentary on Spain's greatest playwright. Since the life of a work of art begins only when it leaves its creator's hands, adaptations and translations form part of the widening river of its progress through history. Posterity adds to the dimensions of the masterpiece, while all readers realize the 'virtual' component in what they read, irrespective of its intrinsic or 'immanent' stature.

The approach adopted in this book is pragmatic; it tries to answer the question: 'How do you best (that is, most effectively and lucidly) discuss the abundant texts around which it is possible to build a literary history of Calderón's reception in Germany?' This Anglo-Saxon approach finds philosophical and theoretical corroboration in the contemporary German school of 'reception aesthetics' (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) represented most notably by the work of Hans Robert Jauss. German criticism, like French, tends to differ from Anglo-American criticism in seeking philosophical or ideological bases for its methods and practices, so a brief summary of the position of Jauss (with which I find myself in broad agreement) will achieve two things. First, the methodological and theoretical bases of the present study will become more clear; second, the reader of English not familiar with the German intellectual tradition

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CALDERÓN IN THE GERMAN LANDS

will find a preliminary exposure to the kind of more abstract thinking to which Calderón's work was often subjected by critics from the time of Lessing onwards. In Germany, at least since the Enlightenment, there has always been a strong link between philosophy and aesthetics, between aesthetics and poetics, and between all these and literary criticism. A German literary critic tends to work out a position based on what we would regard as *a priori* principles, and reads literature in the light of this considered position, while English and American critics tend mostly to get on with it. The interested reader may reflect that the strong philosophizing tendencies of the great Calderón, and the temperamentally speculative quality of German criticism, have contributed to making the history of Calderón's reception in Germany one of the richest and most varied in Europe.

Perhaps the most important essay of Jauss is his *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* ('Literary History as the Stimulus to Literary Criticism'), first published as a university address in 1967.<sup>1</sup> There Jauss questions the ultimate ability of either the Marxist or formalist-structuralist schools of criticism to transcend their own self-imposed historical insufficiencies. In neither theory, Jauss says, is the factor of reception and impact, or the influential factor of the reader, the listener, or spectator, sufficiently taken into account. Literary texts are not, as a rule, written to be read and judged by philologists and social scientists; they transmit information to a suitably perceptive recipient and are designed to produce a constant interaction of question and answer. Jauss's remarks apply with particular force to audiences, who go to the theater in a mood of receptive expectancy. The play's performance is bound to stimulate some conversation, light or serious, during the homeward journey after the final curtain, or, on subsequent days, comment about its merits, when people who have seen the same production fall into discussion. The prospective playgoer may also read reviews to decide if the night out appears worthwhile, or may read them to compare a private judgment with the professional's. The process of 'constant interaction of question and answer' that Jauss describes may take the form of arguments and disagreements between those who have seen the play and differ with the reviewer, with their friends, with letters to the press about the play, and so on. The reception by a first reader (or spectator), says Jauss, is only the first link in a chain of receptive acts, each more complex than the previous one, and these contribute to our understanding of the historical significance as well as the aesthetic potential of a given work.

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[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Jauss's distinctive conception of the 'history of effect' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) derives from this double perspective of aesthetic judgment interacting with objective historical data accumulated through reception and recorded effect. The role of the traditional critic or scholar does not for this reason disappear. He can still use the tools of his expertise to evaluate the 'immanent' qualities of the text (sources, earlier influences, comparison with the author's other works, his literary and rhetorical devices, and so on). I need not summarize Jauss's case, argued from the general premises of his *Rezeptionsästhetik*, for a new conception of general literary history, nor his widely challenged theses concerning the reader's 'horizon of expectation' (Husserl). The upshot is that the constant exercise of aesthetic judgment by critics and public, combined with the history of a work's effect, ought, according to Jauss, eventually to lead to conclusions concerning a work's quality. To quote Victor Lange: 'What is important for such an aesthetic of reception is the mutual exercise of challenge and response; the challenge of a work which, without claiming any fixed meaning, yet contains a variety of objectively describable aesthetic stimuli; and the response of a succession of readers who bring their particular perception (and philological or rhetorical assumptions) to bear upon the accumulated critical experience of previous readers, and who thereby in turn 'define' the work as well as their own historical situation.'<sup>2</sup>

These are useful concepts, which can lead to valuable insights into the quality of Calderón's work. For a variety of reasons, his theater constitutes an ideal subject for a reception study. Jauss's critics have objected that his suggested procedure cannot be effectively applied to more than a few conspicuous and amply documented major texts, so that it is unlikely to yield a useful prescription for the unfolding of a specious and comprehensive history of literature (Lange, p. 70). In the case of Calderón, the problem is not the absence of conspicuous and amply documented major texts, but their enormous number. In 1974 Martin Franzbach reckoned that there were 312 extant versions, editions and MSS of Calderón in Europe to the year 1799 alone. That number has already been exceeded, as material presented in this study will show.<sup>3</sup> Another unique problem is raised if we study the history of Calderón's reception in Germany rather than in Spain. A study restricted to Spain would examine the reception of Calderón's texts (their performance, the professional and journalistic criticism provoked by the plays' performance, statistics of play-runs and box-office receipts) in the original Spanish and in the form in which Calderón composed

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CALDERÓN IN THE GERMAN LANDS

them. But the special problem of Calderón's cultural migration through several languages into the German repertory lies in the obvious fact that for every original Spanish text of Calderón, there may be a dozen foreign-language versions of it, either close and faithful, or rehashed via intermediaries to the vanishing point. At the time of writing (1980), the number of identified translations and editions of *La vida es sueño* in languages other than Spanish is already in excess of 100 and will approach 200 by the end of the century.

The extant material can be allowed to speak for itself and define its own shape. Whatever has survived tells its own story. It tells us something, for example, that when *La vida es sueño* was revived at the Amsterdam Schouwburg during the 1658–9 season in the translation of Schouwenbergh as *Sigismundus, Prince van Polen* ('Segismund, Prince of Poland'), the box-office receipts were enormous for the time, and the exact guilder amount of Dfl. 317.50 has come down to us.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that, while Calderón's *Fineza contra fineza* was put on in the original Spanish for the birthday of Queen Mariana of Spain in 1671 amid the imperial pomp and splendor of the Viennese court, in the next year (1672) Calderón's *El mayor monstruo los celos* was acted in distant Dresden under the title *Das größte Ungeheuer oder der eifersüchtige Herodes* ('The Greatest Monster, or the Jealous Herod'). The latter performance was mounted by the wandering troupe of Johannes Velten, on a rough stage, with a minimum of props and before a largely untutored, possibly illiterate, audience. It is important, too, that Karl Rosenkranz's long and difficult essay in Idealist metaphysics *Ueber Calderón's Tragödie vom wunderthätigen Magus* ('Concerning Calderón's Tragedy of the Wonder-working Magician'), appeared in 1829, only shortly after the appearance of a series of popular engravings of scenes from Calderón's plays suggested from Helmine von Chézy for the *Frauentaschenbuch* or 'Women's Almanac' (Nuremberg, 1823–6; see plates 5–9). The material is of very varied kinds: mundane, imposing, humble, sublime or grotesque; it must be given its appropriate place in the narrative, and the contexts that give the material its meaning must be recreated.

Two further problems of definition remain. What do we mean by a culture? And what do we mean by 'Germany'? The term 'culture' (*Kultur*) figures significantly, for example, in the political-ideological terminology of Marx and in the clinical-psychological nomenclature of Freud, in each case with irreconcilably opposed meanings.<sup>5</sup> Neither



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Henry W. Sullivan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

meaning is proposed here. I mean by culture what Herder meant: ‘a self-consciously cohesive group who have long possessed a geographical living-area, a spoken language, and a distinct set of customs, traditions or even political structures in common.’ The passage of Calderón’s dramas from one culture to another is in the first place their passage from one language to another: a translation in the narrowest sense of the word. The adaptation of a text to suit the tastes and prejudices of another culture, in the light of reigning aesthetic canons or different socio-economic realities and doctrinal adhesions, is a second level of cultural transformation. But in the case of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the common element that binds those cultures is the German language, which is in its turn the single factor that makes Calderón’s work accessible to all of them. Thus by ‘Calderón in the German lands’, I do not mean simply his diffusion in some political or historical unit such as the Holy Roman Empire or the two modern Republics of Germany. I refer to that cultural tradition united by the German language.

I am therefore concerned with German-speaking Europe as it existed before the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> Germany as a purely political unit has a history which is complex but sufficiently well known: there is no need to summarize it here. My narrative provides a certain amount of the background and historical material required for adding local color to a given cultural moment. But the apparently unifying factor of the German language itself requires a brief explanation. The German lands are naturally divided between north and south along the contour where the great north European plain meets the highlands and mountainous districts of Germany to the south. Roughly corresponding to this geographical cleavage runs the so-called Benrather Line, which separates the area of Low German to the north from that of High German to the south. Low German itself falls into two divisions: a western division, namely Low Franconian, the parent (with the admixture of Frisian and Saxon elements) of Flemish and Dutch; and an eastern division, Low Saxon or, as it is simply called, Low German (*Plattdeutsch*). High German (*Hochdeutsch*) became the literary language of all Germany, in part because of Luther and particularly because of the influence of his Bible translations (1522–34). Under Frederick III and Maximilian I, a move towards uniformity in the written language had proved desirable for documents issued by the Imperial Chancery at Prague. The chancery of the Saxon electorate had adopted the norms of the Imperial Chancery by 1500. It was the language of the Saxon Chancery which

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Henry W. Sullivan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CALDERÓN IN THE GERMAN LANDS

Luther chose, as being already the most widely understood, for his versions of the Scriptures. The first Low German Bible was published by J. Hoddersen at Lübeck in 1533.

Local accents and dialects (*Mundarten*) survive, of course, within these two broad categories. A gradual standardization of High German pronunciation was sought for purposes of purer stage diction from the late eighteenth century onwards. Goethe included some remarks on diction in his *Regeln für Schauspieler* ('Rules for Actors') of 1803. The systematic elaboration of 'stage pronunciation' (*Bühnenaussprache*) appeared in 1898 in Theodor Siebs's *Deutsche Bühnenaussprache* ('German Stage Pronunciation'), a work now close to its twentieth edition. The obvious advantage of stage German was that it permitted a troupe to act the same play in the same accent in cities as far apart, geographically and in local dialect, as Hamburg (close to Denmark) and Vienna (close to Hungary), or Königsberg (on the East Baltic coast) and Bern (on the slopes of the Swiss Alps). Because of the cultural medium provided by a common literary language and an increasingly standardized pronunciation on the stage, and in spite of great discrepancies of geography and political unity, the theater in Germany was able to thrive in a plurality of important cultural and provincial capitals, as it does to this day. No one city has ever dominated the German stage in the same way as London and Paris, which have never relaxed their grip on the theatrical life of England and France.

The Dutch in the seventeenth century did not hesitate to call their native tongue *duitsch*, or sometimes *neder-duitsch*. Nowadays *Duits* (reformed spelling) only applies to the neighbor tongue, German, the local language being referred to interchangeably as *Hollands* or *Nederlands*. A modern Dutchman is, for understandable reasons, offended to be told that his language is a Low Franconian 'dialect' of German, although *deutsch*, *duitsch* and 'Dutch' are all reflexes of a common etymon. The family similarity of German, Dutch and Flemish (which differs hardly at all from Dutch except in accent and some vocabulary) did however, play a crucial role in the transmission of Calderón's texts via Brussels and Antwerp, which remained under Spanish occupation till 1648, to Amsterdam in Protestant Holland, where they were performed in that language nowadays known as Dutch. The details of the transmission of Calderón in Dutch translation to Germany in the seventeenth century are given in the second chapter. Seventeenth-century Holland has a natural place in this study for obvious reasons: the Netherlands were part of the Spanish Empire until 1648, and the