

Puns and Word Play in Calderón's *Autos Sacramentales*

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IT IS A DISSERVICE to Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681) to extract from the tightly woven, organically conceived and always metaphoric texture of his dramatic poetry, an arbitrary selection of onomastic and toponymic designations. Theology and philosophy, poetry and drama, music and dance are closely knit in the *Autos Sacramentales*, consecrated to the celebration of the Eucharist and frequently concerned with the meaning of Mary. Arbitrarily to single out one element or group of elements, invites misconception. Nevertheless, the study of Calderón's names throws light on his style, structure, and objectives.

The abstract, allegorical and doctrinal *Autos Sacramentales*, written and presented each year as part of the Corpus Christi celebration, are a beautiful mosaic of metaphors whose meanings essentially reside in the gift of eternal life and grace by Christ to mankind. Calderón was as interested in ancient languages and scholastic theology as he was skilled in the Baroque art of poetry and the arts of music, dance, and stage design, highly elaborated in seventeenth century dramatic and operatic productions. He never hesitated, however to use such "lowly" linguistic tricks as anagrams, word play and puns,¹ or such simplistic dramatic means as placard display to achieve his religious and dialectical aims.

While Calderón's theological and philosophical orientation is chiefly grounded in St. Thomas and St. Augustine, the hub of his

¹ Cf. Herman Iventosch, "Onomastic Invention in the *Buscón*," *Hispanic Review*, XXIX (1961), 15–32, and "Moral-Allegorical Names in Gracián's *Criticón*," *Names*, IX (1961), 215–233; Henry N. Bershas, *Puns in Proper Names in Spanish*, Wayne State University Studies, No. 9 (Detroit, 1961); Sister M. Francis McGarry, *The Allegorical and Metaphorical Language in the Autos Sacramentales of Calderón* (Washington, D.C. 1937); and S. Griswold Morley, *Los nombres de personajes in las comedias de Lope de Vega. Estudio de onomatología*. California University Publications in Modern Philology, LV.

societal and artistic universe is Madrid. Madrid, synonymous with the elegant court of the Spanish Hapsburgs, undergoes a kind of ideological and poetic transfiguration to represent an acme of holiness of which the Holy See itself might well be envious. In the proem (*loa*) of *El cubo de la almudena*² the allegorical figure Ingenio (Intellect or Wit) states that to celebrate the triumph of Faith over Heresy, a sacramental play is to be given "en Maderit en la Corte" (566A), Madrid being the most appropriate place since it contains all the excellences conceivable, from the perfection of the laws of its senate to that of the beauty of its ladies. In the play itself, the apostasizing Secta explains that laying siege to Madrid is the equivalent of attacking the Church itself, for Madrid is "esa corte de la Iglesia" (567A). Secta resorts to a combination of etymology and syllogistic reasoning to prove the point. Using the spelling MADERIT and alluding to the Arabic origins of the word, Secta reasons that if Madrid is "Madre de Ciencias" (568B), the mother or matrix of all knowledge, and if the Church is similarly "Madre de Ciencias," then to wage war upon Madrid is to wage war upon the Church (569A). In another play, *El santo rey don Fernando* (Parte Segunda), Madrid presents herself as the Court of the Universe, basing her contention once again, on the Arabic origin and meaning of MADERIT: "supuesto que Corte soy / del Orbe Madre de Ciencias, / y católica Sión, / que esto incluye en Maderit la arábiga traducción" (1291A).³

From MADERIT we are swiftly transported to the metastasized MAREDIT wherein the Church (*Iglesia*) has placed her hopes in a treasure – the transubstantiated body of Christ hidden in that city. MAREDIT is not only the house of the Bread ("Casa del Pan") or granary ("Almudén")⁴ but is also a beautiful, living portrait of

² All quotations from the *Autos Sacramentales* are from the edition of Ángel Valbuena Prat, *Don Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Obras Completas*, Tomo III (Madrid, 1952). The preliminary essay to the entire text and the brief study which precedes each *auto* are an informative source of orientation into the literature of Calderón's *Autos Sacramentales*.

³ Two articles on the *bona fide* linguistic origins of Madrid might be of interest to the reader: Juan Corominas, "Sobre la etimología de Madrid," *Revista de Filología Española*, XLIII (1960), 447–450; Asín J. Oliver, "Historia del nombre Madrid," *Arbor*, XXVIII (1954), 393–426.

⁴ For an interesting discussion of *almud*, *almudí*, and *almudén* see Juan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* (Berne, 1954), p. 160.

MARÍA (571 A). Immediately preceding this, is an implied allusion to the woman diametrically opposed to "María," namely EVA. Neither Eve nor the culpable apple (*Manzana*) is concretely named. Instead, Madrid's river, the Manzanares, more opulent in its literary significance than in its fluvial abundance, is indicated by Alí, the Moorish king. He does not name the Manzanares but rather describes it as "este río, / cuyo nombre nos acuerda la fruta del Paraíso!" (566 A) (This river whose name recalls to us the fruit of Paradise.) Gracián in the sixteenth "Discourse" of his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, treats the concept of disparates as one element of wit and ingenuity of thought and expression. As an illustration he cites an epigram which counterposes Helen with Penelope and, later "Eva" with María," "porque *Eva*, leida al revés, dice el *Ave de María*." (*Eva*, written in reverse, is the Ave of María.)

Whether or not it be a service to the cause of Mariology, the fact remains that the composition (on the stem *MARE*) and possible meanings of the name MARÍA drove even such sober writers as Calderón and Gracián into a veritable linguistic frenzy. In *La semilla y la cizaña* (based on the parables of the Sower and the Tare) María is described as a ship on the seas (*mares*) whose name is harmony. No one, reasons Calderón, can say NAVE (ship) and MARÍA without having said AVE MARÍA! The character representing the Tare (*la cizaña*) remarks that according to the parable (Mark IV, 1) a ship at sea was the CATEDRA out of which Jesus preached. In terms of an implied syllogism the concept may be very simply expressed as:

	AVE (MARIA)	=	NAVE
			NAVE
			= CHURCH
therefore	MARIA	=	CHURCH

Another play in which the relationship of the meaning of the name Mary to MARE is exemplified is *A Maria el corazón*. At the end Calderón echoes a familiar poetic apotheosis of Mary, Star of the Sea: "Ave, estrella de la mar, / *Ave, Maris Stella*" (1150 A).

Descending one link in the great chain of being, we note that the names of kings are a constant source of seemingly ingenious word-play, always fraught, however, with serious and even transcendental meaning. For Catholic Spain, especially in the post-Tridentine era, the greatest menace loomed from the heretical and politically am-

bitious Northern countries, center of Lutheranism and Calvinism. In *La Protestación de la fe*, Sabiduría (Wisdom) observes that the imperfect, vitiated form of the Queen's name, Cristina, mirrors the imperfection of her faith. In order to achieve perfection and true faith, the truncated form, CRISTINA, will have to reflect the change to CRISTIANA. To the missing A there is attributed an almost onomastic power since A = ALPHA = GOD, the Alpha and Omega of all creation. In addition, Calderón puns on her becoming "PERFECTAMENTE" or perfectly Christian upon the achievement of Catholicism in lieu of Cristina's present condition of "MENTE IMPERFECTA," imperfect in mind: "que a ser venga / Cristiana perfectamente / quien hoy lo es mente imperfecta" (734A). At the conclusion of the play, Cristina, in scholarly garb, studies the question, abjures and anathematizes her Lutheran heresy and is consequently invited to partake of the Divine Banquet. Thus does she deservedly assume the truly Christian name, CRISTIANA.

The august name of Philip, because of its political and religious importance and connotations, is frequently used by Calderón in expressive and symbolic kinds of word-play. *El maestrazgo del toisón* incorporates the legends of the Golden Fleece and the Order which bears its name in the symbology of the Lamb. Malice (Malicia) invents an intrigue designed to oppose the prophesied power of the Lamb. The principal player or leader is to be a Duke of North German origin whose name will be Philip, from the Greek meaning tamer of savage beasts: "El nombre Phelippe sea, / que es (como al griego construyas) / domador de incultas fieras, / puesto que soy fiera inculta" (896A). The Duke's mother is to be named Margarita because her Son is sometimes called "mercader de preciosas piedras" (896A); his Bride will bear two names, MARIA and ANA, "el uno, Misericordia, / cuando el otro Exaltación . . . por Exaltación, María, / por Misericordia Ana" (900A).

The frame for the weaving of the legends and history of the Saviour, the Golden Fleece and the House of Austria is to be set up once again, in Madrid, the center of the Faith. Sadly enough, the imperial ruler "dueño / de la redondez del mundo" (893B), before whom the sacramental and historical drama is to unfold, is in reality the imbecile, rachitic Charles II. This fact does not alter Calderón's ideal view of the monarch and of the Hapsburg or Austrian royal family who are thus exalted in the proem: "bien

como heredero / de la siempre verde copa / del Tronco de Austria,
a quien dieron / tantos reyes como hojas / los catolicos renuevos /
de sus armas . . .” (893B).

In the drama proper, there is a constant play upon the parallel between the coming of the Lamb (Cordero) from the East and the “eastern,” (from *AUSTER*) Germanic origins of the Hapsburgs, with special emphasis on the Philips. The Order of the Golden Fleece (el Toisón de Oro) was, indeed, founded by an “easterner” and a Philip – Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1396–1467). Calderón also alludes to Philip, Archduke of Austria, progenitor of the Spanish Hapsburgs and the son of the Emperor Maximilian and Mary of Burgundy. In Calderón’s own era it was Philip IV who had given renewed outward splendor to the Order. His mother was Margarita of Austria (the pearl of the previously cited “piedras preciosas”) and his wife, María Ana or Mariana de Austria.

As the Duke’s mystic Ship approaches the “australes montes” (905B) (eastern mountains) the Bride exclaims that any Austrian cape which a ship might circumnavigate would be a Cape of Good Hope: “que la austrial playa / es cualquier cabo que doble / Cabo de Buena Esperanza” (906A). The Merchant’s Ship, in the play of that title, *La nave del Mercader* (1464B–1465A), sailing on waters which are calm for Him alone, finds shelter not only in Buena Esperanza but also in Santa María, Puerto Rico, la Florida, la Vera-Cruz, Santa Fe, among others. The Ship reaches la Habana (LAHABANA = LA VANA = VAIN) where sin is justly deposited and then swiftly plows its course to Ostia and Cáliz, the destination of the sacred wheat. By an inverse process of association Ostia evokes Hostia (the Host) and Cáliz (Chalice), the port of Cádiz.

In the resplendent proem to *El viático cordero*, two Suns with rays painted to correspond to the hours of the day come on stage with Geography (Geografía). On the latter’s back is visible the written motto, *La Fe pide ser tuya*. The message implied is that nowhere in the world is there ever an hour when mass is not said. This oracular semaphore leaves but one question unanswered. What Catholic monarch will see to it that the prophecy is fulfilled? Should the letters of the motto be scrambled in an attempt to find the answer? Geography objects that this might appear to be a mere reiteration of anagrams (1158A). The Ninth Hour counters

that such an objection has no validity; in music new tunes are played on old instruments: “a nuevo tono, no importa / el ser la guitarra vieja” (1158A). The pieces of the map are “shuffled” as they move about in a dance sequence until the second meaning appears.

L a f e p i d e s e r t u y a
 1 2 3 4 5 4 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

F e l i p e d e A u s t r i a
 3 4 1 6 5 8 7 10 2 13 9 12 11 14 15

In a further variation or “mudanza” of the above, the motto is rearranged to apostrophize the king: “*La fe, Felipe de Austria, pide ser tuya.*” And with that additional fillip to the meaning and identity of faith and the monarchy, the play ends. In a similar music and dance sequence of the proem to *El divino Orfeo* the dancers, wielding the shields they are using against impinging Pleasure, form a protective row consisting of the letters EUCHARISTÍA.

One of the most elaborate anagrammatic displays, again used to express the identity of king or kingliness and church, is found in the proem to *El santo rey don Fernando* (Primera Parte). The occasion, as Faith (Fe) explains, is a double one: the celebration of the holiness of the Sacrament and of the saintliness of Ferdinand III (1199–1252). Mystery, metaphor and prosopopeia are the instruments to be used in the presentation of the allegory and mystery. Six characters, each representing the quintessence of his species, come upon the boards bearing the following placards:

1. Sol (Sun) = S
2. Águila (Eagle) = A
3. León (Lion) = L
4. Rosa (Rose) = R
5. Oro (Gold) = O
6. Corazón (Heart) = C

Rearranging themselves the figures spell out CARLOS. To praise the king is to praise God. Sadly enough, it is once again the imbecilic, ill-fated and benighted Charles II (CARLOS) whose name is thus glorified and whose judgment is to be heeded in the dispute among Faith, Hope and Charity, as to which of the three virtues is pre-eminent. Perhaps only Faith, Hope and Charity could have

sustained Spain during the reign of Charles II, one of that country's major disasters. Historically, however, the play deals with a nobler past, and so ideality and joy – not reality and despair are the tonic chord here. Sun says: “Alegrémonos todos del buen presagio, / de empezar un Rey Angel, con un Rey Santo” (1268B).

In the works of Calderón and his contemporaries, mythological figures ranging from Apollo to Zeus frequently appear and are endowed with Christian significance, symbolism and attributes. Two plays in which there are names drawn from Greek mythology, which are then changed and adapted to the theme of the sacramental play, lead to an understanding of how unceasingly Calderón sought fresh sources for his ideological dramas. The Cretan labyrinth through which Theseus, Ariadne, Phaedra and Minos thread their ways is transformed to represent the labyrinth of the world (*El laberinto del mundo*) in which man, if unredeemed, would be irrevocably and hopelessly lost. This sacramental play, belonging to the latter period of Calderón's long creative life, represents, symbolically, the triumph of Faith; visually, musically and dramatically it represents the triumph of Calderón's creativity as well. The stage, or more exactly, the carts (*carros*) represent heaven and earth; dancers, double choirs, and a rich orchestral accompaniment of percussion and brass instruments (always meticulously indicated by Calderón)⁵ underscore and glorify the poet's intention.

Once again the theatre is to be in the Madrid of Charles II, “Patria y Centro / de la Fe y la Religión, / como Católico Reino / del Segundo Carlos de Austria” (1558A). Responsory choruses and instruments unite in a magnificent and portentous affirmation of the mystery: “Y todo sea nuevo, / música, entonación. cántico y metro. Y todo sea nuevo” (1558B). Thus, in truly operatic style, does the proem serve to introduce the play. All of the *dramatis personae* bear their Christian allegorical names at the outset and are then required to find substitute names which mirror their roles and functions in the world. Theos is to assume the name of Theseus

⁵ Accounts and documents indicating the care, attention, and money lavished on these elements may be found in such works as D. Cristóbal Pérez Pastor, *Documentos para la biografía de D. Pedro Calderón de la Barca*, Tomo I, (Madrid, 1905); Jack Sage, “Calderón y la música teatral,” *Bulletin Hispanique*, LVIII (1956), 275–300; N. D. Shergold and J. C. Varey, *Los autos sacramentales en Madrid en la época de Calderón* (Madrid, 1961); and José Subirá, *La participación musical en el antiguo teatro español* (Barcelona, 1930).

(Teseo) which will reflect both his kingliness and Christ's sojourn, in human form, on earth. Theos /Theseus sails on the Merchant's Ship which comes from afar bearing the sacred Bread (Pan). When Truth questions him about his ship, he replies, almost with the gallantry of a noble hero of the conventional Spanish *comedia*, that he might well be a pearl merchant seeking "la preciosa Margarita," to be found in each tear shed by Truth (1565 A).

The human name of Mentira (Falsehood) is to be Ariadna (Ariadne). Truth assigns her this role since, reading, as in Hebrew, from right to left, the last three letters of MENTIRA (ARI) spell lion. Adding ARI to ADNA (mistress or subduer, or tamer) completes the word ARIADNA. Therefore Mentira/Ariadna with all her violence is to be Señora del León. Truth is to assume the name and role of Fedra (Phaedra) whose name means clear, bright and illustrious – the qualities of truth. One wonders also whether the Spanish Verdad/Fedra with the unvoicing of the v, the metathesis of the rd – dr and the presence in each dissyllable of the vowels e and a were phonic traits too tempting for Calderón to resist! The assignment of roles is completed as Mundo (World) is given the part of Minos, the rationale here being not the two letters they have in common but rather the meaning of Minos ("flight") in Hebrew. Truth finds Mundo/Minos to be an extremely apposite transformation since the world has indeed fled from its dutiful obedience to the Creator. The locus of the ancient labyrinth, Crete, (Creta in Spanish) is easily tagged in the Christian labyrinth which is the world itself, Creata. Verdad insists that the syncope Creta from the Latin Creata, denotes a corruption of form and meaning. The stage and characters are then completely set for the allegory:

Y, pues, ya asentados quedan
las tres etimologías
de que metáfora sean
Mundo, Mentira y Verdad,
Minos, Ariadna y Fedra (1565 B).

The great god Pan is an epitome of Calderón's transformation of ancient myth and word into Christian sacrament. In *El verdadero dios Pan* Calderón, not only plays upon the meaning of PAN (Bread) but also illustrates the common exegetical procedure of

interpreting figures and events of the pre-Christian world – Old Testament, Greek myths, etc., as being anticipatory revelations of the coming of the Messiah. Pan, losing all traces of the satyr, tells, instead, of his birth in a straw-filled manger and of his being discovered by some poor shepherds. The emphasis on PAN (bread), TRIGO (wheat) and GRANO (grain), the latter representing the Word, is constant and insistent. Pan tells of his birthplace, Bethlehem (BELÉN), which means, in Hebrew, HOUSE OF BREAD. He asserts that the Grain is the Word and that the Grain was found among the straw. He refers to the Greek meaning, all (OMNE) of PAN, and concludes with a double pun; “es omne el pan, y el omne es todo” (1242A). When asked if he is the man to whom the Gentiles gave the name of the god Pan “¿Eres, di, un hombre a quien dieron / de dios Pan mis gentes nombre ? / Dinos si eres Dios y Hombre.” Pan replies to all nations and religions that He is not the god Pan but the God of All: “que no soy dios Pan; / . . . que soy Pan DIOS” (1253A).

In this paper there have been demonstrated particular techniques learnedly and dramatically employed by Calderón to give significant meaning to specific allegorical and symbolic names in a few of his *Autos Sacramentales*. Onomatology applied by Calderón to myth, legend, scripture, history and geography serves both to design the architectonic structure of his dramas and to embellish that structure with organically related thrusts of wit, humor and ingenuity. If Fray Luis de León wrote his *Nombres de Cristo*, perhaps one of the most exquisite works of prose in the Castilian tongue, for the learned, cultivated reader of doctrinal dialogues, Calderón de la Barca presented his “names” in the form of beautiful, erudite poetry which, when combined with the visual and dramatic arts and music, could and did reach audiences drawn from the nobility, the learned, and the populace.⁶

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⁶ Ángel Valbuena Briones, *Perspectiva Crítica de los dramas de Calderón* (Madrid, 1965); J. E. Varey and A. M. Salazar, “Calderón and the Royal Entry of 1649,” *Hispanic Review*, XXXIV (January, 1966); Ángel Valbuena Prat, “La escenografía de una comedia de Calderón,” *Archivo español de arte y arqueología*, Núm. 1 (enero-abril, 1930); Ángel Valbuena Prat, *Calderón. Su personalidad, su arte dramático, su estilo y sus obras* (Madrid, 1941).