

1997

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## Repository Citation

Stroud, Matthew D. "The Lessons of Calderón's *La cisma de Inglaterra*." *Hispanic Essays in Honor of Frank P. Casa*. Ed. A. Robert Lauer and Henry W. Sullivan. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. 253-63.

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## The Lessons of Calderón's *La cisma de Ingalaterra*

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AMONG Jacques Lacan's most useful theoretical innovations are his constructs to describe human behavior in three registers: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. The imaginary is the register of the ego, of fantasies of possession and totalization, of rivalry and revenge, of specular relationships of the subject with its own reflections or its own projections. The symbolic is the register of the law and order, of language, of repression, of submission to Other structures and systems such as culture, civilization, and society. The ceaseless conflict between the imaginary imperatives for individual conquest and the symbolic surrender of the individual in favor of the Other is a frequent literary theme. Not surprisingly, especially for literature written in earlier centuries, such plots almost always point in the direction of the symbolic over the individual, of the need for one to sacrifice one's own pleasure for the good of all. Seen in the light of post-modern criticism, however, even the most conservative plots reveal that the symbolic cannot replace the imaginary, and that there is always an irrespressible element of the real that undermines the success of both the imaginary and the symbolic. The Spanish Golden Age *comedia* is full of examples of tidy endings that do not seem so happy upon closer inspection: the marriage of women to men who dishonored them and who do not love them, or the triumph of individual honor at the cost of the life of a loved one, for example. Calderón's *La cisma de Ingalaterra* is a useful example of the manner in which the workings of the three registers undermines the apparent symbolic moral lesson.

The characterizations of Wolsey, Anne Boleyn, and Henry VIII seem to show that if one succumbs to personal desire and ambition or to dogmatic error, rather than obeying the law and mitigating one's desire for the benefit of society, the result is individual and social failure. The characters of Wolsey and Anne are especially monochromatic caricatures of the imaginary register. These two characters are even divorced from historical accounts of their actions in context and distilled into two thoroughly ambitious egotists.<sup>1</sup> Wolsey, born in humble surroundings, wants more than anything to be Pope, and he is willing to do whatever it takes in order to "exceed his desire," as an astrologer once told him he would (230).<sup>2</sup> He will serve anyone who will help him become Pope, first Henry, then Anne; he expresses open hostility towards those who stand in his

way, particularly Catherine. As the beleaguered Queen notes, Wolsey is mad, foolish, and vain, and much more interested in his own advancement than in the good of the kingdom (1087-92). Others frequently note that he is vanity itself (260, 2134), a most dangerous tyrant operating outside the law (1249, 1273, 2147), deceiving and lying to his king (1607-09, 1718-22), turning Henry's *turbación* to his own advantage, and plotting the downfall of the Queen.

Anne is an equally one-dimensional character. She, too, is extremely ambitious, but she only minimally tolerates the courtly behavior necessary to achieve her aims. She wants fame and power, to have dominion over everything, including envy (497-502); she notes that she would give her life for the honor of being called "majesty" (1303-04); she feels so powerful that she is exempt from any kind of punishment, even by heaven or hell (1331-32). She is lifted up, literally and metaphorically (1165-68), by Henry, but she resents the slightest affront and bristles at having to bow before the Queen and King (724-30, 836-38). Even Henry refers to her as vain, lascivious, and ambitious (1770); she uses her amorous hold over him to best advantage by being "esquiva" (452). She tries to poison Catherine (2260-61) and wishes for the deaths of Mary and Wolsey as well (2293-96), all in a mad egoistic frenzy aimed at vanquishing all her rivals and gaining total control over others.

Both Wolsey and Anne combine their imaginary ambition with symbolic authority: the former to be Pope ("Vice-Dios," 1753), the latter to be queen. In many ways, their ambition is to dominate the symbolic society, and it is precisely the imaginary activities of some characters that lead to the failure of the symbolic for others. Wolsey's attempts to become Pope lead to the permanent schism in the symbolic institution that until that time had existed as the sole, universal Church in England. Anne's attempts to become queen lead to the annulment of a marriage, the ouster of the virtuous Queen Catherine, and ultimately to the tremendous political and religious strife under Queen Mary, of which there is a foreshadowing in the unrest that has broken out (2112-13). Even more damning, Anne is suspected of being a secret Lutheran (455-56). Neither the church nor the state can keep the promise of law and order faced with the chaotic, egoistic forces of the imaginary registers of Wolsey, Anne, and, of course, Henry.

Although Wolsey and Anne have some responsibility for the evil that Henry commits, they could not have been successful without Henry's own participation in his imaginary attraction to Anne. She first appears to him as an image in a dream, an imaginary illusion that lures him into the catastrophic mistakes that follow (1-4, 12-13, 124-28). When he finally meets Anne he is greatly troubled, consumed by the paradoxical effects of imaginary capture:

¿Quién eres? ¿Cómo te nombras,  
mujer, que deidad pareces  
y con beldad me enterneces,  
si con agüeros me asombras?  
Entre luces, entre sombras  
causas gusto y das horror;  
entre piedad y rigor  
me enamoras y me espantas;  
y, al fin, entre dichas tantas  
te tengo miedo y amor. (859-68)

She is a lure that captures men's ego by her beauty and makes them lose their senses:

bellísima sirena,  
pues aduerme a su encanto los sentidos,  
ciega los ojos y abre los oídos. (346-48)<sup>3</sup>

Anne appeals to the lack in him; he must possess her in order to feel complete. For the illusory pleasure promised by the short-circuit desire in the imaginary register, Henry is disposed to disregard his duties as king, husband, and responsible member of society. He is, at least in this one area, mad (1637, 1723), consumed with thoughts of the object of his desire, and irritable with anyone who stands in the way of his desire. Even though he realizes that he is being manipulated by Wolsey, he cannot resist the attraction he feels for her.<sup>4</sup>

But Henry is not just a man driven by lust. He is also king, metaphorically associated with the sun (Fischer 116-18), in whom is invested the divine power of the law. He not only engages in symbolic activity himself, he is in some sense the arbiter, the representative of the symbolic social order. The other characters show respect and submission to Henry in his role as king through their symbolic offers to kiss his hands and feet (e.g., 1195-97, 2293); it is Henry from whom one asks for permission to marry Anne and Mary (834-35, 1227-28). He provides strength, comfort, and protection. He is the commander of his soldiers and the master whom all his subjects serve as symbolic slaves (844, 1421-24, 1438, 1600, 2311-13). When he turns his back on Catherine (1993-94), it is a manifest symbol of his capricious turning away from honor and duty. At the same time he is prudent and wise (268-69), but most of all "cristianísimo" (1196, 1816, 2870); he spends his time writing books in defense of the true faith and against Luther (79-96, 114-15, 146-47, 647-48). Famous for his pen as well as his sword (1198-99), Henry links his position of symbolic power to his ability to read symbols in nature and to search for and propagate symbolic truth, and he,

like Basilio in *La vida es sueño*, is well known for his erudition. He analyzes his own dream, foreshadowing the miserable end of his relationship with Anne (921-24) even though he believes that his wisdom can prevail over the influence of the stars (1343-44).<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately for these characters, neither the imaginary register, with its promise of wholeness and egoistic triumph, nor the symbolic, with its promise of peace and order, can fulfill its promises; both are necessarily doomed to failure in the long run. At the heart of all the calamity lies desire, which springs from the real, from the inherent insufficiency of the individual and the split subject that results from the submission of the subject to signification (Lacan, *Écrits* 286-89, 302-17). Because the subject cannot reintegrate itself short of death, desire is unquenchable; by definition it cannot be fulfilled, for then desire would cease to exist. In the imaginary register, desire is for one's own image, or the fantasy image that one has projected onto an object, either a person or a thing. Since the desire is not for the object *per se*, but for one's own image of the object, either the subject cannot really possess the object, the object ceases to be alluring once it has been obtained, or desire is in no way lessened with the capture of the object. In fact, in a very real sense, in the imaginary desire of a subject for an object, it is the object that captures the subject.

Wolsey's machinations, his cultivation of the trust of Anne and Henry, his manipulation of other characters, and his ambitions to become Pope are all dashed with his fall from Henry's grace. As his plans unravel, his arrogance is overcome by insecurity and suspicion (2548-51); his alliance with Anne becomes suffused with distrust and enmity for the "ungrateful" woman (2452) and he ultimately turns on Anne and seeks her death. At the end he loses everything that mattered to him: power, wealth, possessions (2330-35). Anne likewise sees her aspirations thwarted. She rose as high as her ambition could take her, but it could not hold because it had no sound foundation. She erupts in fury, swearing revenge against Wolsey (2206-21) and bringing about his fall from power. Henry's passion for Anne quickly turns to suspicion, anger, and violence (2548-51, 2632-54). In the span of just a few lines, Anne is transformed from queen into beast and basilisk as he orders her to be imprisoned (2656-64).

Similarly, even though Henry is king, his power cannot be absolute. Henry is bound by the law as all prudent rulers are, and considerable dramatic tension results from the conflict between Thomistic and Machiavellian views of the powers of the monarch (Bacigalupo 219-23). He is, ironically, punctilious in his insistence that the law be obeyed. He asks for Anne's hand twice so that the two of them should be joined in sacred symbolic union (1425, 1590), but only once his marriage to Catherine declared invalid (1663-70, 1686-93, 1849-53), and even then he insists upon Mary's succession to the throne upon his death even though Mary is only as legitimate as his marriage to Catherine (1869-74, 2006-09). At

the same time, he is a man, and just as subject to imaginary demands as anyone. Even in his religious, scholarly activity, there is an additional hint that also feels a rivalry with Luther above and beyond their doctrinal differences (147-60, 198-204, 1820-21), and, ultimately, he does not, he cannot, have absolute dominion over knowledge; at best he is “el docto ignorante Enrique” (2990). In interpreting his dream, he, like the spectator of the play, is required to fill in the gaps left by the signifiers (Fischer 116), gaps that can only be filled in by desire and its effects, and, in so doing, constructs his future in accordance with his interpretation of the truth. Again like Basilio, he interprets his dream and it comes true, not because the interpretation discovered some eternal truth but because he constructs situations to bring them to pass. The truth is “constructed retroactively” (Sullivan 115), especially with regard to his love for Anne.

With Anne, he is just as susceptible to irrational action as Carlos, for whom love is both everything and impossible, an all-consuming fantasy of perfection and redemption (421-28). The ideal fantasy of love is to join souls, literally and symbolically, overcoming all obstacles along the way (816-17), but even from the beginning, love, which promises so much, is described as well in terms of suffering and tribulation, blindness and deception:

Confieso que estoy loco y estoy ciego,  
pues la verdad que adoro es la que niego.  
Pero si un hombre el daño no alcanzara,  
aunque errara, parece que no errara;  
que en tan confusa guerra,  
sólo errará el que sabe cuándo yerra.  
Bien sé que me ha engañado  
Volveo; y he quedado  
de su falso argumento satisfecho;  
y es que el fuego infernal que está en el pecho  
hace que, ciega mi turbada idea,  
niegue verdades y mentiras crea. (1723-34)<sup>6</sup>

Love is a passion of the soul that cannot be governed, even by a monarch (930-32). Perhaps all these tribulations would be worth it if, in fact, one could be sure of uniting with the other, of losing oneself in the other, of conquering the other, but love will never fulfill its promises of happiness and wholeness in the imaginary, and order and tranquility in the symbolic.

Love and marriage are both inhabited by the unassimilable real that prevents closure and fulfillment. The imaginary, in its egoistic short-circuit, cannot escape the specular limitations of narcissism and selfishness. For that reason, love is considered to be transitory, even ephemeral, without benefit of marriage. But the

symbolic (king, law, government) is also incapable of bringing stability and satisfaction. Desire cannot be contained or subordinated to any symbolic order; it goes beyond the workings of law, order, culture, and civilization to highlight the insufficiency of all symbolic agencies and institutions. Desire disorders; it overwhelms reason and good intentions (Ruiz Ramón 629; Andrachuk 226-27). In Henry's marriage to Anne, their symbolic realization of their imaginary passion cannot prevent catastrophe, just as Catherine's marriage to Henry did not guarantee her a permanent role as queen. Anne is no more faithful to Henry than he was to Catherine. Kings may be able to do anything because of their power and their status (2587), but they are not exempt from the failures produced in both the imaginary and symbolic registers. No symbolic power can ever eradicate free will and the ability of the individual to act independently: ". . . no rinde / el poder la voluntad, / porque ésta siempre fue libre" (2617-19). Henry from the outset knows enough to fear his dreams and Anne's role in his life (125-28), and he recognizes the impossibility of his happiness and the punishment that awaits him for his impetuous actions (1767).

In Henry's dream, Anne says that she will erase everything that he writes: "Yo tengo de borrar cuanto tú escribes" (6); she erases, through imaginary lure and capture, what he writes in his symbolic mission to uphold the authority of the law and the Church. His desire for her destroys the symbolic fabric of law and suppression of the individual ego. Since Henry is also king, his personal failures become the failures of the entire kingdom. When he errs, his transgressions become political catastrophes; as divine ruler, his sin becomes heresy. He may act as irresponsibly as he wishes, and nothing can be legitimately done to stop him (Bacigalupo 212, 219-21, 223). He may be wise, but his passions lead to instability (2039-41). His foolish love for Anne brings him little more than grief and threatens the future of his realm. Just as he is swayed by Wolsey to act against Catherine, he is likewise persuaded by Anne to act against Wolsey (2286-92). His own daughter calls him cruel in his dishonorable treatment of Catherine (2524).

Thus, desire and its consequences led to the split of the Church of England with the Church of Rome, the willful and suspect annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine, the downfall of both Wolsey and Anne, and political strife and instability in the kingdom. If that were all there were, then the lesson would be that one must repress one's desires at all costs in order to avoid these calamities. In order to assess the overall workings of desire in this play, however, one must also consider the fortunes of Catherine and Mary. Placed as a counterexample of moral virtue, Catherine is the good Catholic, the obedient wife, the paragon of the law that is at the heart of the symbolic register. She is not only the holiest of the children of the Reyes Católicos, but she is the most Catholic queen the English have ever had (27-29). She is beautiful, loving, virtuous, obedient,

and practically divine (655, 1688, 1757). Her marriage to Henry after Arthur's death was approved by Pope Julius II through a "legitimate, holy, and wise" dispensation (70). Despite the brusque treatment by her husband, she seeks to get closer to him and even enlists Anne's help in trying to soften Henry's heart toward her (2046-51). She never accepts that Henry is not still her husband (1899-1902, 1985, 1990-92, 2540-41); her honor remains unsullied. She even comes to the aid of Wolsey despite his plotting against her (2481-82), and she is generous towards Anne, at least initially (638).

Catherine is hardly a model of virtue rewarded, however. Through no fault of her own, she goes from Queen to prisoner, from a "marvel" to a shadow (2404-5), and ultimately to death. She says her fortune is harsh (1876), but fortune is not a supernatural force, only the result of the actions of others and her interaction with them. In her reproaches of both Henry and Wolsey, and in her unwanted rivalry with Anne, Catherine's correct symbolic pronouncements are no match for their imaginary headlong rush to desire. Although she always asserts that she is still legitimately married to Henry (1985), even marriage and the obligations of monarchy are not enough to avert this tragedy. The court is a nest of deception, unhappiness, death, and ruin, she says (2061-72), and all these evils can be laid at the feet of irrepressible desire. The only recourse for Catherine is to appeal to God, who stands as the Other of the Other, the only source of wholeness and completion, and therefore Himself a fantasy. But nothing Catherine does can make things right again. Only God can change Henry's evil ways, but in this case He cannot or does not set things right. Her prayers are unanswered as Henry, who sees his mistake with Anne, still does not reconcile with Catherine in time to be her husband again. Henry acknowledges that Catherine was right, and that heaven will give her her reward, but her plight does not improve, unless one considers her death to be the ultimate Christian redemption (see Parker 279). At the end, Henry's arrogance turns to fear and repentance (2739-59, 2794-800). He regrets the chaos he has unleashed, but he knows that restitution is impossible (2788-89).

Instead, Henry hopes to make things right by assuring that Mary will inherit the throne upon his death (61-64, 1869-74), although even here he is at least partially motivated by revenge against Anne (2828-31). Mary's legitimacy hinges on the validity of Henry's marriage to Catherine. But in trying to reestablish symbolic order in England, Henry runs into other results of his uncontrollable desire that are part of the historical context of the play well-known by the audience. His only male heir, Edward VI, was born to neither Catherine nor Anne, but to Jane Seymour, a minor character in this play. Mary does not inherit the throne directly, but must wait until her half-brother (possibly illegitimate, depending upon the interpretation) dies at the age of 15, and only then after overcoming the attempt to make Lady Jane Grey queen. The



difficulties ahead are alluded to in Mary's rigid nature and in the civil strife mentioned in the text. She refuses to swear her unconditional obligations to the realm and tells Henry in so many words that he is not worthy of his role as king because of his grievous errors bordering on Lutheran heresy (2922-37). The only thing that matters to her is adherence to God's law, which means Catholic law (2922-25, 2947-53). She demands allegiance to the Church; all those who do not so swear will either repent or be burned (2963-67). At the same time, she dissembles in her oath when she mutters, "Sin ellas" (2983), in an aside, thus vitiating the solemn meaning of her oath (Bacigalupo 224).

The play ends with a recognition by Henry of his mistakes and a supposed return to legitimacy and order. The ostensible lesson, which Parker found to be "quite unambiguous" (252), is that one should emulate the Catholic paragons, Catherine and Mary, and denounce the folly of pride and heresy demonstrated by Henry, Wolsey, and Anne. But Catherine certainly does not triumph, nor do Mary and the Catholic Church in England in any long-lasting sense. As Susan Fischer notes, "evil triumphs and the protagonist does not suffer for his wrongdoing" (115). When placed in the larger historical context, Henry's actions prove not the value of submission to the symbolic order, but the persistence of desire and the intensity of its consequences. In a very real sense, Anne Boleyn triumphs in the person of her daughter, Elizabeth, who succeeded Mary because she had no issue by Philip II of Spain, thus providing the historical final symbolic defeat for Catherine. After Mary's attempts to keep England in the Catholic Church (and the reputation she earned as Bloody Mary for the religious persecutions during her reign), Elizabeth breaks once and for all with the Church of Rome, thus shattering any illusion of symbolic religious unity. If there is any coherent lesson at all in *La cisma de Ingalaterra*, it is that desire cannot be eradicated, that it insists in the subject in such a fashion that it cannot be completely suppressed, and that the symbolic order, itself not whole, cannot prevent the consequences of desire either for the individuals involved or for the society and culture in which they live. Ultimately, there is no happy ending, and the best anyone can hope for, as Catherine proves, is the perfection one can only achieve in death.

## NOTES

1. Parker was the first of many to discuss the historical inaccuracies in the plot, noting in particular dramatic reasons for the changes (251-52, 255, 280-82). Mackenzie (25-26, 34-35) also treats the historical material at length, and notes Calderón's more human treatment of Anne Boleyn (who is made less wicked), Catherine (who is made less saintly), and Henry (who is portrayed less harshly). Loftis finds most curious (and damning) Calderón's omission of any

mention of Elizabeth who, like Mary, was officially illegitimate if one accepts the invalidity of Henry's marriage to Catherine and his annulment of his marriage to Anne (212-13).

2. The citations are from Ruiz Ramón's 1982 Clásicos Castalia edition, which, although it is a good edition of the text, has many errors in the line numbers. For example, the numbers go from 1445 to 1550 in the space of five lines, there are six lines of poetry each between 2380 and 2385 and 2650 and 2655, and only four lines between 2725 and 2730. As a result, the line numbers should only be considered as an aid in locating the text and not as an absolute indication of their position in the play.

3. See also 280-84, 861, 1020-22, 1559, 1561. The insistence on Anne's beauty is also indicative of the role of the eyes in the scopical drive in the imaginary lure. Lacan's theories of the gaze dovetail nicely with the classical notions of love that enters through the eyes through an exchange of souls. See Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 77, 93, 102-03.

4. Ruiz Ramón (631) notes that the success of deception is a function not of the skill of the deceiver but of the desire of the deceived, who accepts the deception as a projection of desire. Andrachuk analyzes Henry's contradictory thoughts as a revelation of his "subconscious mind" (228), and goes so far as to say that Calderón himself speaks through Henry's subconscious utterances. Andrachuk's use of the term "subconscious" seems to borrow a great deal from popular psychology, but his attempt at psychoanalysis is much less convincing than Pfandl's. He seems to assert that the conscious mind is capable of holding only one idea at a time. The unconscious, at least for Lacan, is quite different, and incapable of "speaking" in this fashion. In this context, Henry's contradictions are merely illustrative of his conscious awareness of his duties and his desires, of his being "of two minds" about what is going on.

5. This is very similar to the situation with Basilio in *La vida es sueño*. In both cases the pride of knowledge and erudition, which is an imaginary function, leads to disastrous errors of interpretation. Pfandl's article studies in some detail the appearance of the dream as a manifestation of Henry's unconscious in this play, especially Henry's unconscious desire to be a new Pope and have a love affair at the same time (366-89). The notion of a real unconscious in a literary character has always seemed suspect, since characters are not real but only created by an author responding to his or her own desire, and Calderón's Henry can certainly not be psychoanalyzed the way the real Henry or the real Calderón could be. At the same time, Pfandl's insights demonstrate that, at least, Calderón knew enough about human psychology to be able to give his character enough fictional unconscious to give Freudians and post-Freudians something to study 300 years later.

6. Throughout the play, love's effects are described in terms of a bolt from the blue (363) that causes confusion (371, 840-41, 1727, 1733), death (913, 921-22), pain and tears (911-12), hopelessness (1115, 1592-94), suffering (766-67, 1123, 1612-13, 1629-32), blindness (464, 1474, 1721, 1723, 1733), deception (1378-85, 1608, 1729), danger (2139), error (1411), death (1243, 1371, 1591, 1604, 1610, 1615, 1758-59, 1780-82, 2126), rage (1604), fire (1432, 1617-18, 1704-05, 1732), unhappiness (1630, 1771), madness (1637, 1723, 2141), pain (1756), and jealousy (2127).

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