



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (155)

**TITLE:** *El prodigio de Alemania*

**AUTHOR:** Pedro Calderón de la Barca & Antonio Coello

**EDITOR:** Antonio M. Rueda

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## I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

Calderón de la Barca and Antonio Coello's *El prodigio de Alemania* (1634) is a seminal work for understanding the intersection of literature and statecraft in Golden Age Spain. Rediscovered only recently in a 17th-century *suelta*, this edition marks the play's first modern publication. The play dramatizes the downfall of Albrecht von Wallenstein, the Imperial Generalissimo during the Thirty Years' War, following his victory over the Protestant forces at Lützen.

The significance of *El prodigio de Alemania* lies in its function as a direct instrument of political propaganda. Written and performed shortly after Wallenstein's assassination, it served to justify the Crown's decision to eliminate a once-celebrated hero who had become a perceived threat to the Habsburg authority. This volume provides a rare opportunity to study how the great Baroque playwrights responded to immediate historical crises, manipulating public sentiment and national identity under the direction of the Count-Duke of Olivares. This kit offers a framework for advanced exploration of theater as a social weapon, the mechanics of Baroque historiography, and the complexities of international diplomacy in the 17th century.

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## II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES

This edition allows for a deep dive into the political and aesthetic strategies used to navigate historical "truth" on the public stage.

### Theater as Political Propaganda:

Analyze the shift in Wallenstein's portrayal between the (lost) play that praised him and *El prodigio de Alemania*. How do Calderón and Coello navigate this "about-face" to convince the audience of his treason?

Discuss the role of the Count-Duke of Olivares in commissioning theatrical works to manage the "obsessions" and "sentiments" of the Spanish public during the war.

Examine the play's closing line, "Casa de Austria," as a thematic and ideological anchor.

### The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) as Narrative Context:

Explore the significance of the Battle of Lützen (1632) and the death of Gustavus Adolphus as catalysts for the plot. How does the play use real military reports and historical figures (Gallas, Gordon, Devereux) to build verisimilitude?

Discuss the geopolitical stakes for Spain and the Empire, focusing on the tension between the "Catholic League" and the Protestant forces.

### The Figure of Wallenstein (Prodigy and Traitor):

Analyze Wallenstein's long "autobiographical" speeches (*blasones*). How does the play construct a "psychologically weak and insecure" character driven by resentment?



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Discuss the role of astrology and premonition in the play. How does Wallenstein's obsession with his "star" and future portents serve to delegitimize his authority in the eyes of a 17th-century audience?

### Dramatic Structure and Collaborative Authorship:

Examine the play's structure, particularly the use of long monologues to fill in historical gaps (contextualization).

Discuss the collaborative nature of Golden Age playwriting. What do "toscos buriles" (rough chisels) suggest about the shared labor of Calderón and Coello in rewriting history?

### The Role of the Gracioso in Serious Drama:

Analyze the character of Morolludo (likely played by the famous Juan Rana). How does his "vulgar" and "villano" humor serve to degrade Wallenstein's lofty ambitions?

Discuss the use of the *gracioso* as a mouthpiece for the common people's underlying loyalty to the Emperor, contrasting with the betrayal of the elites.

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## III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

**The Ethics of Historiography:** Discuss the tension between "historical truth" and "poetic truth" in the play. Given that the authors were responding to recent, controversial events, how do they manipulate the narrative to suit the regime's needs?

**The "Silent" Enemy (France):** Rueda notes the conspicuous absence of any mention of France or Cardinal Richelieu in the play, despite their crucial role in the war. Discuss why the Spanish Crown might have ordered this silence during a time of sensitive diplomatic negotiations.

**A Comparative Analysis with *La vida es sueño*:** Both written around the same time, compare the themes of authority, free will vs. fate (astrology), and political legitimacy in *La vida es sueño* and *El prodigio de Alemania*. How does the "real" Wallenstein compare to the "fictional" Segismundo?

**The Staging of Assassination:** Analyze the final scene at the castle in Egra. How do the authors use the setting, lighting (candles), and dramatic timing (Carnival night) to heighten the sense of justice and inevitable retribution?

**Devereux and the Making of a Hero:** The play elevates the real assassin, Walter Devereux (de Bros), to a primary heroic role. Discuss the literary process of transforming a mercenary/soldier into a symbol of imperial fidelity and moral right.

**The Concept of "Prodigy":** Reflect on the title's ambiguity. In what ways is Wallenstein a "prodigy" (vencedor and vencido), and how does his death itself become a "prodigious" event for the House of Austria?

## IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Text:

- Calderón de la Barca, Pedro & Coello, Antonio. *El prodigio de Alemania*. Edited by Antonio M. Rueda. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 155)

### Key Secondary Scholarship:

- **Beladiez, Emilio.** *España y el Sacro Imperio Romano Germánico*. (For context on Wallenstein).



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- **Díez Borque, José María.** *Sociedad y teatro en la España de Lope de Vega.* 1978.
  - **Fuller, J.F.C.** *A Military History of the Western World.* (For details on the Battle of Lützen).
  - **García-Luengos, Germán Vega.** "Calderón y la política internacional: las comedias sobre el héroe y traidor Wallenstein." 2001. (The pivotal study of the rediscovered text).
  - **Mann, Golo.** *Wallenstein: His Life Narrated.* 1976. (The definitive biography).
  - **Parker, Geoffrey.** *The Thirty Years' War.* 1984.
  - **Sullivan, Henry W.** "Calderón and the Politics of the Thirty Years' War." 2000.
  - **Wilson, Peter H.** *The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy.* 2009.
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## V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

- [Classic Spanish Drama & Beyond: 5-Book Bundle.](#)
- **Other titles in the bundle:** [Los engaños de un engaño](#), [Carlos II el Hechizado](#), [Campanas a medianoche](#), [The Limping Devil – El Diablo Cojuelo](#).
- **Related Golden Age authors:** Luis Vélez de Guevara.

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