

THE NAME OF THE GAME IN HISPANIC LITERATURE

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From the earliest times of civilization, mankind has intrinsically expressed scientific fascination and wonder of the cosmos, and in particular, of the movements of round celestial bodies as they circulate in their atmospheric trajectories. Essentially, the sphere and its circular properties have had such human appeal since Creation that the development of games and sports owe much to the cylindrical shape and size of planets, constellations, and the like. It is a known fact that, in ancient Greece and Rome, athletes participated in various forms of physical competition, part of which required the equipment of oval objects, in addition to other types of amusement used to display their competitive skills and strengths. Modern games such as basketball, polo, tennis, baseball, golf,

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soccer, and so forth, can effectively trace their evolution to these glorious beginnings. Historically, also, the popular game of "pelotá," or Spanish handball was introduced into the Iberian peninsula by the Arabs and was diffused into Central Europe from the end of the Middle Ages until after the French Revolution. In large measure, handball and variations of this game utilizing a hard or rubber ball of different dimensions and weights, were reserved for the nobility, which Cervantes briefly describes in the first part of his masterpiece, "Don Quijote de la Mancha."

In ancient times, moralists and jurists had often condemned certain kinds of physical and non-physical games. For example, Aristotle in pointing to non-physical games, called its players greedy and thieves, while Ovid, in his "Arte de Amar, III," reproached game participants by recounting the evils they occasioned. Spanish writers, to a certain extent, embracing generations of historical criticism, have likewise demonstrated recrimination of games on which sums of money were wagered. In the 16th century, Jerónimo Osorio opined that non-physical games were the masters of laziness, the instruments of avarice, the purveyors of cheating, the destructors of estates,

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the materials for personal animosity and perpetual torment. In the 17th century, Navarrete, a Spanish missionary, emphasized that crimes, revolutions, robbery, blasphemy, and human despair result from social engagement of games, and particularly, its breeding of, or attraction to gamblers. Similarly, in the 18th century, the eminent Benedictine monk, Fray Benito Feijóo, asserted that games, regardless of their nature, foster looting and produce self-degradation, although he saw the human need for rigorous physical development.¹

In a world where fear of death and dread of the Last Judgement were omnipresent, men in the Spanish Middle Ages were more frequently concerned about their spiritual well-being than their physical condition. They often looked upon their bodies as instruments of sin, and consequently, as impediments to the attainment of salvation. Feudal society did promote a strong but narrow military training program that prepared gentlemen to fight for the cause of the church and to fulfill their feudatory obligations. Ideally, knights were expected to possess vigor, endurance, and military prowess, but they were not expected to be largely mindful of their health, cleanliness, grace, or beauty

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of their bodies.² All of this changed, however, during the Renaissance as a new merchant class created conditions that were conducive to the development of sports, competitions, dances, gala festivals, and communal martial training. Dancing and fencing masters were commissioned in court schools, as was witnessed during the 13th century reigns of Ferdinand III and his son Alfonso X, and lavish balls, masquerades, 'ballets', and tournaments were customarily fashionable. Moreover, tennis, archery, wrestling, bowling, hunting and many rugged warlike exercises were part of a princely education, requiring as it were total dedication and protection of one's physical welfare and the security of the kingdom. Even though the church, from the Dark Ages through the late Renaissance did not encourage the Athenian ideal of the harmonious growth of mind and body, play and games continued to exist among people, largely members of the aristocracy, as is recorded throughout history by frescoes, miniatures, and literature.

Several medieval Spanish writers curiously delighted in physical and sedentary-like pastimes, for inserted in many pages of selective works, we learn

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that games were played either as a means of seeking diversion from a rather prosaic existence, or as a method of exercising the body in preparation for war. For instance, the 11th century minstrel who composed "El cantar de mio Cid," the first Spanish epic poem, on few occasions in the first song, tells us about knights who "jugaban las armas," or displayed skill at arms and in other war-like games by wielding a wooden lance and shield, and divesting any sword and armor to smash targets as a requisite of practicing the art of physical combat. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the aforesaid Alfonso X of Castile and Leon, and his nephew Don Juan Manuel often referred in selective writings to the mastery of "jugando las armas," both in theory and practice. It was Alfonso, the Wise, perhaps more than any other sage of his times, who expressed much interest in the overall subject of games, whether classified as physical sedentary, together with the joys of music and dancing, as extolled in his famous "Cantigas de Santa Maria." To understand the King's concern for games, one may turn to his "Siete Partidas," a compendium of medieval laws, wherein from time to time, speaking of the education of

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princes and other members of royalty, a description of corporal instruction and guidance in wrestling, boxing, hunting, fencing, jousting, falconry, and others is clearly found. Alfonso particularly enjoyed the game of jousting (Sp. "la justa") which in the Middle Ages involved the practice of make-believe combats, and it was this amusement which bore the imprint of a bellicose nature as did hunting. Furthermore, in bringing warriors closer to the surrounding natural habitat, the sport of the chase, on which Don Juan Manuel wrote his "Libro de la caza," awakened in the nobility a kind of sensibility which acquainted each participant with outdoor life and a knowledge of wild animals and the effects of the physical world on the hunter as well as on the hunted. Once again, in the "Partidas," Alfonso X further alludes to descriptions of games like chess (ajedrez), checkers (damas), backgammon (chaquete), craps (dados), cards (naipes), word games or riddles (rompecabezas), and others. His interest in human pastimes were later compiled in "El libro de ajedrez e dados e tablas," similarly designated as "El libro de los juegos" (1283), which was loosely based on traditions and adaptations of Arabic texts. The Wise King further dictated laws on

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all kinds of gaming to one of his court collaborators, Maestro Roldan, who edited and inscribed them into a legal document officially called "El ordenamiento de tafurerias." Some of these laws were also incorporated into the seventh "Partida," especially as they affected the operation and supervision of gambling houses at that time. In a way, therefore, Alfonso X can rightly be called one of the earliest gaming legislators in history.

Juan Ruíz, Archpriest of Hita, in his illustrious "Libro de buen amor," (1343), which Menéndez y Pelayo once named the "Comedie Humaine" of the Middle Ages, mentions in this narrative work, specific "juegos" or games in reference both to carnal and divine love, as well as to gambling, for which he admonished people against engaging in any of its forms, notably the use of dice. Nonetheless, he evinces much pleasure derived from playing ball and fun-filled activities as observed in these lines;

still it is time that pleasures oft will
drive dull care away wherefore, my lady
daughter, come into my house and play a
merry bout or two with ball, and other
pastimes gay, there I will give you nuts
to crack--we'll frolic all the day.³

In the popular 15th century ballad "Romance Primero de Moriana y el Moro Galván," we read about the most

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noble of 'all games (checkers) in the Middle Ages as follows:

Moriana en un castillo
 juega con el moro Galvan
 juegan los dos a las tablas
 por mayor placer tomar.⁴

Also in the same century, Hernando de Pulgar, secretary and official chronicler of the Catholic Kings of Spain recorded in his "Cronica" that Ferdinand V of Aragon "placiale jugar todos juegos, de pelota e axedrex e tablas..." and in which the historian records the sovereign's excessive delight in participating in these pastimes.⁵ Likewise, García Sánchez, a poet, in one of his "canciones" or songs intermittently alludes to "naipes" or playing cards which were popularly enjoyed in Castille, enumerating such terminology as "as que corre," "brac," "baceta," "bog," "cucu," "quínola" (reversis), and so forth. Fernando de Rojas, celebrated author of "La Celestina," (1499) pens the terms "xaque" Eng. check and "mate" Eng. mate with reference to the game of chess, as well as "tableros," or chessboards, "corriendo caballos" or chasing horses, "echando lanzas" or tossing spears, "quebrando espadas" or breaking swords to relate figuratively to the emotional anguish Calisto suffers in regard to his unrequited love of beautiful

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Melibea.⁶

The noted 16th century Catalan humanist, Luis Vives composed his "Dialogos" drawing heavily on Luis de Milan's "Libro de mores de damas y caballeros." In his treatise, Vives, this greatest of Erasmus' disciples, annotates numerous kinds of courtly games and their rules, apart from related sociological and political concepts of education, which in his time were commonly enjoyed by children, adolescents, and adults. For example, in one chapter he recounts his observation of young children near a school playing "juego de taba," Eng. dibs, a rather vulgar game in which participants attempt to throw sheep's shanks as high as possible in the air. In addition, he mentions other children's games such as "juegos con cáscaras de nueces," or cracking nuts and "pasa pasa" or legerdemain. Beyond the age of ten or twelve Vives denotes the popularity of such games as "cartillas" or cards and "pelota" or handball, and that mature adults enjoy participating in "juegos de dardos" or darts and "de adivinanzas" or guessing games.⁷

Another humanist, Cervantes de Salazar, a contemporary of Vives and a native of Toledo, completed

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his own dialogues in a work called "Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico in New Spain," which was both part of a larger study including a commentary on Vives' treatise as well as a text designed for the use of students in learning Latin. When Cervantes de Salazar arrived in Mexico from Spain he brought the manuscript of his own commentary on Vives, together with the first four dialogues dealing with games popular among university students at that time. The author devotes chapters to a discussion among native Indians of jumping, of obelisks or small wooden pyramids used with a rubber ball to be knocked down on an open green, which eventually became the pins used in bowling, besides hand tennis or handball. Parenthetically, the game of "pelota," "jeu de paume" in French, and "pila palmaria" in Latin originally was an exercise consisting of receiving the ball and driving it back again with the palm of the hand.⁸ In former times, the game was played with the naked hand, then with a glove, which in some instances was lined, but afterwards cords and tendons were bound around players' hands to make the ball rebound more forcibly, which ultimately developed into the racket in tennis, and the "cesta" in the

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Basque sport of "jai-alai." Interestingly, it is said that Hernando de Cortés, in 1521, when he first marched into Tenochtitlán, later called Mexico City, noticed natives on several occasions playing a form of handball, about which he subsequently informed the Catholic Kings. Lastly, another game which Cervantes de Salazar describes in his book is one played with iron hoops, which probably was a modification of the French "pake-maille," a kind of activity played with a ball struck with a mallet through a high arch of iron, hence a forerunner of the game croquet.⁹ Salazar's text fascinated students at the University of Mexico, who read about games and learned to play them skillfully in the New World, which became part of their everyday life as well as a means of enlivening their spirits and improving their health.

In his "Guerras Civiles de Granada" (1595-97) Ginés Rérez de Hita comments on an interesting game styled "juego de las cañas," which was played by military students in Spain until the turn of the last century. In effect, the game consisted of mounting images of war on the backs of horses and then placing the animals between two squadrons of cavaliers, who at the crack of a whip charged the so-called foe bearing reeds

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instead of lances or swords to level the images.¹⁰ This kind of equestrian exercise is analyzed extensively in Luis de Banuq̄la's "Libro de la jineta" (1605). In the same year, the immortal Cervantes penned his brief, but curious observations of games in chapter 32, first part of "El Quijote" which reads in translation as follows"

"I have told you already, my friend, replied the priest (to the innkeeper) that it is done, to divert our idle moments. Just as in all well-ruled states such games as chess, "ajedrez," tennis, "pelota" and billiards, "trucos" are permitted for the amusement of men who do not want to work, or do not have to, or cannot...."¹¹ Cervantes was referring here to these activities as being privileges of the nobility and not of the common populace, which curiously today, typify three sports that have lucratively embraced human competition and in which all social classes have been, in one form or another, actively engaged. Baltasar Gracián, a contemporary of Cervantes, records in his first work "El héroe" a game called "desterrar una barra" or simply hitting and advancing iron bars. This game or exercise was somewhat popular among country people in Spain; and

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a variation of its use was further mentioned in Hartzbusch's play "Los amantes de Teruel," (1873) wherein the dramatist talks of "a la barra" or tossing a bar as far as possible, similar in this respect to javelin-throwing.

Occasionally, from the Golden Age to present times, Spanish writers have alluded briefly, or in detail, to various forms of games, which provide the reader with some insight into human pastimes of a given period in history. Consequently, such names as "naipes," "ajedrez," "billar," "pelota," "damas," "azar," "caza," "de manos," "de guerra," "esgrima," "tiro de arcos, discos, pichones," "toros," "dados," and a host of others reappear in literature with relative consistency. In contrast, from a literary perspective, the term "juego" has in specific ways referred to distinct manifestations of writing styles like the "juegos de escarnio" or profane representations of medieval theater containing events derived from Latin comedy and having a satirical or burlesque character. Also, in medieval epochs, "juegos escolares" or dramatic creations in Latin written by students and clerics, generally underlying a religious theme that was closely related to ancient

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liturgical drama, were also highly popularized. Moreover, one can cite as well the "juegos florales," literally feasts that evolved into poetic contests that in 1351 were first instituted by Provençal troubadours from the city of Toulouse. Similarly, in 1393, Juan I of Aragón founded these "juegos" in Barcelona, while in Castille, Enrique de Villena, a Spanish author of the 15th century, subsequently introduced them into poetic circles in Madrid.¹² These same "juegos florales" in the late 19th century were reintroduced by the distinguished writer and philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, in collaboration with some of his contemporary poets.

Perhaps the most commonly mentioned category of games appearing in Spanish literature is cards. During the last two centuries, some writers who have described distinct types of card playing in their works include the Duque de Rivas, Larra, Pérez Galdós, Pereda, Benavente, Unamuno, Baroja, Cela, and others. For instance, in his most famous play "Don Alvaro o la fuerza del sino," the Duque de Rivas sketches one scene in which Don Carlos, Pedraza, and officers of the state partake of the game "veintiuna" or blackjack. The dramatist shows his knowledge of the game and uses such terms as "talla" or hand, "gran punto" referring to the player or the

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points scored, names for each picture card, and so forth. Likewise, Pérez Galdós, in his play "La de San Quintín" (1894) employs such names as "sota," "caballo," and "rey" which in cards are figures corresponding to the knave or jack, queen, and king, and also uses the expression "golpes en la ruleta" or chances at roulette to describe some of the amusements to which members of Spanish society were often attracted. In Benavente's play "El nido ajeno," of the same year, the card game "besigue" appears, which comes from the French "bezigue" and is played with several packs resembling pinochle. Earlier in the century, Mariano José de Larra, in his short story "La sociedad" refers to another French card game called "écarté" which is yet occasionally played in Spain and France. With further reference to card playing, the aforesaid Unamuno in "El marqués de Lumbría," details the game "ombre," while his compatriot Pío Baroja, in several novels, records the popular Basque game "mus," which essentially is a version of bridge. Miscellaneous references to other games in 19th century Spanish literature can be found in Machado y Alvarez' "Biblioteca de las tradiciones populares españolas" (1883), wherein descriptions are given to children's

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games including "del toro," Eng. young bulls, "de la pedrea," Eng. rock throwing, "saltar escalones," Eng. jumping from steps, as well as to Juan Valera, who in his short story, "El caballero del azor," talks about jousting, and Leopoldo Alas' (Clarín) story "Protesto," in which he compares the "juego de damas" or chess to business transactions and their ordinary suspensions of action.

From a political and social point of view, there are many game-like diversions that in recent decades have preoccupied the minds and hearts of Spanish authors, who in their words have clamored for governmental reform and human liberty from oppression. To clarify, one need only look at the impact of the Spanish Civil War on certain writers to discover references to realistic games of chance and fearless abandon as portrayed by literary characters in one setting or another. For example, Juan de Goytisolo's "Juego de manos," (1954), later translated as "Young Assassins" is, in some respects, a novelistic facsimile of Renoir's 1939 film masterpiece "Rules of the Game." Yet, instead of describing the fall of a decadent French aristocracy on the eve of World War II, as did the French filmmaker, Goytisolo presents despair, anarchy, and cynicism of a

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group of unhappy adolescent intellectuals who must resort to games or tricks to survive in an age characterized by a decaying social structure resulting from the fratricidal war which ravaged Spain, 1936-39. His contemporary, Camilo José Cela, manifests in "La colmena" similar games of chance and cunning which the people of Madrid were to carry out to endure the chaos of war and its aftermath in hopes of bringing some stability and meaning to their wretched lives. Two other important Spanish writers, Sender in "Crónica del alba," and Delibes in "El camino," to mention but these novels, beautifully describe the subject of children and their juvenile adventures in rural areas of Spain, but without political or social objectives. Lastly, in his "Flor de juegos antiguos," the noted Mexican novelist Agustín Yáñez, provides us with a collection of children's games, including chess, hawking, hunting, and so forth that have been popular for generations, which stylistically represented a vast change for this author in 1941, whose literary objectives normally concerned revolutions, the plight of the peasant farmer and his family.

In summation, many of the above-mentioned games or kinds of amusement are common to all nations and races

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of people from earliest times. However, it is interesting to observe the appearance, regardless of frequency or the occasion, of human frivolity taking the form of "juegos" that have attracted the thoughts of Spanish writers across the centuries. Notwithstanding what was formerly considered anathema to the church, namely body-building exercises in connection with the development of physical endurance and prowess on the battlefields of Spain, strict and careful instruction was proffered to gentleman preparing for war, particularly during periods of Muslim domination of Spain. Later, in the Renaissance, when beauty of body and a healthy mind were conceived as the embodiment of the true masculine ideal, men ought to foster physical programs and perform acts of skill to help them achieve such goals as those handed down from Athenian eras. Regardless of the nature of the game, Cervantes, for one, observed that the nobility engaged in pastimes as a remedy for moments of idleness and boredom. Gambling, whether it consisted of card playing, wrestling combats, jousting, dart throwing, and so forth, attracted the attention of sundry Spanish authors, some of whom frowned upon it as having corruptible influences on society, especially on moral human values and sacred institutions of life. At any rate, the subject of games is recorded in selected writings of Spanish literature which convey to its readers the joys and pleasures inherent in their activities that people have relaxed themselves

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by playing at various stages of life. In short, while juvenile games are ordinarily chosen freely for the purpose of personal entertainment or education, there remain other games, much more serious in scope and nature requiring chance and astuteness as observed by Cela, Matute, Goytisolo, Gironella and other contemporary prose writers, that clearly dispel and attempt to interpret child-like amusements as analogous to the game of survival in a hostile and indifferent world.

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¹Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, Vol. 28 (Barcelona: Hijos de J. Espasa Editores, 1958), p. 3074.

²D.B. Van Dalen, "The Idea of History of Physical Education During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." This chapter is contained in Earle F. Zeigler, A History of Sport and Physical Education (Champaign: Stipes Publishing Company, 1971), p. 218.

³Juan Ruiz, The Book of Good Love, trans. Elisha Kent Kane (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 120.

⁴M. Romera-Navarro, Antología de la Literatura Española, Desde los Orígenes Hasta Principios del Siglo XIX (New York: D.C. Heath and Company, 1933), p. 45.

⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁶Fernando de Rojas, La Celestina, I (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1966), p. 246.

⁷Luis Vives, Diálogos Latinos (Barcelona: Editorial Poliglota, 1940), p. 89.

⁸Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico in New Spain, trans. by Minnie Lee Barrett Shepard (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 100.

⁹Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰Romera-Navarro, p. 196.

¹¹Miguel de Cervantes, El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha (Barcelona: Editorial Ramon Sopena, S.A., 1956), p. 296.

¹²Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, p. 3080.