

# Reading Paths in Spanish and Portuguese Baroque Labyrinths

Ana Hatherly

University of California at Berkeley

*The problems of reading and classifying labyrinth poems of the Iberian baroque are addressed. A quantity of significant illustrations is provided and commented, setting forth guide-keys for reading and interpretation.*

In the Iberian Peninsular baroque poems called "labyrinths" (composed in Latin, Spanish, or Portuguese) the most striking aspect is their twofold nature: on the one hand, their visual impact, with a remarkable display of creative calligraphy or printing; on the other, the complexity and the profusion of paths proposed to the reader, always implicit in the text but not always immediately evident. Because of this, the understanding of labyrinth poems necessitates the acquaintance with the rules of poetry-making upon which they are based.

Among the *preceptistas* of the period, the Spaniard Rengifo stands out as one of the best-known. His *Arte Poetica Espanola*, first published in 1592,<sup>1</sup> seems to have been a revered model for the poets of his time and, to this day, remains a major source of information for peninsular pattern or non-pattern poetry of the baroque period.<sup>2</sup> Rengifo's *Arte Poetica* has nowadays acquired further meaning, becoming in itself an example of the evolution suffered by the *poesia artificiosa*, for, as editions of the work appeared over the years, successive additions were introduced into it allowing us to see in a panoramic way the development of some of the forms.

In what concerns labyrinth poems, my personal research has enabled me to confirm that the compositions that can be included in that category follow quite closely the rules set out in Rengifo's *Arte Poetica*. Consequently, in *A Experiencia do Prodígio*,<sup>3</sup> I was able to gather all the labyrinths I had so far encountered into three main groups:

verse labyrinths	( <i>labirintos de versos</i> )
letter labyrinths	( <i>labirintos de letras</i> )
cubic labyrinths	( <i>labirintos cúbicos</i> )

## Verse Labyrinths

Verse labyrinths are usually made of four or five line poems, with a normal aspect but arranged on a single page or sheet. This type of text usually carries an indication of how many readings may be obtained and how many possibilities of combination or permutation are considered viable. The most fre-

quent reading paths proposed for verse labyrinths to be added to the normal one are: *alternation of lines and strophes*, one by one, two by two, three by three, etc.; *reverse readings* from right to left, from bottom to top, from end to beginning, etc.; and *diagonal readings*. Whichever the path or paths chosen, perfect, meaningful poems must always result, at least perfect so far as the rules are concerned. In the compositions which include in their title a relation to the chessboard, reading paths similar to chess moves are to be considered as well. In Figure 1 we can see an example of the chessboard kind of poem, included in a 1724 edition of Rengifo's *Arte Poetica Española*.

A variant of the chessboard verse labyrinth is shown in Figure 2, a text attributed to Luis Nunes Tinoco, a Portuguese poet.<sup>4</sup> At the base of this composition are indicated the main reading paths starting from the center — *Carmine concelebrat* — and the number of verses resulting from the possible combinations — 14,996,480 — an astronomical figure which I have also found in a similar poem by the Spaniard Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz, included in his celebrated *Metametrika*, published in 1663.

Yet another type of verse labyrinth is seen in Figure 3, a composition dedicated to the Portuguese Conde de Villaflor, D. Sancho Manoel,<sup>5</sup> where the reading paths are indicated by letters — A, B, C, etc.

Figure 1. Chessboard poem. Juan Diaz Rengifo, 1724.

**LABYRINTHO**  
AL MODO DE EL JUEGO DE EL AXEDREZ,  
QUE TRATA DE EL NACIMIENTO DE CRISTO  
NUESTRO SEÑOR.

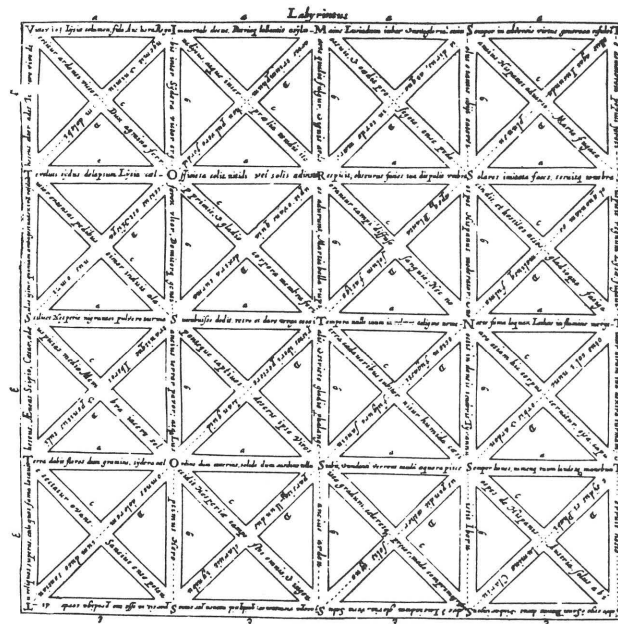
<p>Son veinte y cinco no mas Si de repente las cuentas; Si las cuentas por compás, Algunas menos, ó mas, Son cinco mil y quinientas.</p>	<p>Con un Hijo, que parió Siendo Virgen ecogida, (Segun nos lo prometió), Lucifer va de caida Quando el hombre reñcaró</p>	<p>De el modo, que convenia Por levanto al Redemptor Para nuestra mejoría Havesis visto tal primor No ferá, como foía</p>	<p>Nuestro pecado pagó Por levantar mi esida Humilde por mi nacido Siendo Virgen la parida Ya mi fuete fe trocò</p>	<p>Siendo de tan gran cantia O que lupremo favor Pues Dios Padre allí lo embia Mostrando su gran amor Esforzó mi torbardia</p>
<p>La Virgen Santa Maria Con las entrañas de amor Oy nos ha dado el Meñias Amanzó Dios fu amor Cumplióse la Profecía</p>	<p>Remedió nuestro peccado Contra nuestra Madre Eva Por aquel caro bocado Hizo Dios tan alta prueba De fu Clemencia obligado</p>	<p>Dando de fu amor señal Recuperó lo perdido Fué la paga mas cabal En un Peñebre mecido Con afición paternal</p>	<p>En un Peñebre está echado El que nuestros males lleva Y con carne disfrazado Porque Luzbel no le atreva Dios le puso en tal estado</p>	<p>Nuestro Gordero Pasqual De Carne humana vestido Ha nacido en un Portal Nuestro desforis fu fido Tomando nuestro metal</p>
<p>Con el Parto Virginal Fué nuestro gozo cumplido Su Clemencia Celestial De Caridad encendido Hizo perdon general</p>	<p>La que Virgen concebíó Fué causa de nuestra vida De mi culpa se encargó Con amor, que le combida Aquel Verbo, que encató</p>	<p>Como Norte, que nos guia Quiandonos el temor Ya pues peccador confia Pues Dios sale por fador Venciendo al que nos venia</p>	<p>Al buen pueto nos sacó Con tan humilde venida Pues Dios tanto fe usará Con paga, que es tan crecida Por el hombre, que pecó</p>	<p>O dichosa compañia Aquel caudatolo Azor Mira que burlio daria Como fabio Carador Quando al mundo descendia</p>
<p>En una noche muy fria Nació de Oveja Pastor El que mal no merecia Porque esse mi tormento En un Peñebre plañia</p>	<p>Siendo de gracia dechido Porq mas fu amor nos mueva Aquél Leon figurado Salio manio de la cueva Encogido, y abreviado</p>	<p>Villióse de mi fayal De puro amor confundido Por baxar a mi estado Lucifer anda caido Hecho mi Dios temporal</p>	<p>El Sacro Verbo encarnado Redimió la culpa de Eva Teniendo tal bocado Aunque mas el hombre debia Para que quedé pagado</p>	<p>Haciendose nuestro igual El mismo, que señalado Contoso está herial Pues solo Dios ha cumplido Mostrandose principal</p>
<p>Ha fanado nuestro mal Como eslabo prometido Haciendose Dios mortal Una Virgen le ha parido Quien imaginara tal</p>	<p>A todo el Mundo libró Con Caridad, nunca oída Porque no perdiera yo La Magellan ofendida A si mismo se aplacó</p>	<p>Siendo pues la culpa mia Ya no trata de rigor Llora la Eterna siegría Pagará el mismo Criador Lo que el hombre no podia</p>	<p>Con nosotros conversó La Magellan ofendida Aunque al mal q Adán causó Sabia mucho a la medida El grande precio, que dió</p>	<p>En Belén nació este dia Nuestro gran Dios, y Señor Con fu gran fabiduria Para salvar al decidor De fu caudal lo poniz.</p>
<p>Por sola fu correfia Por salvar al peccador Pagó quien no lo debia Hecho el hombre acreedor Con amor que nos tenia</p>				

Figure 2. Chessboard labyrinth. Luis Nunes Tinoco, seventeenth century.

<i>lymphae</i>		<i>Vivax</i>	<i>Rex Petrus</i>	<i>IN</i>	<i>QVVM</i>	<i>Condamat</i>	<i>Populus</i>	<i>Vive Sopha diu.</i>
	<i>Belli</i>	<i>Mars alter</i>	<i>In Orbe</i>	<i>In Vrbe</i>	<i>Te illustrat</i>	<i>Prin-</i>	<i>ceps</i>	
<i>lostri</i>	<i>Tu fulmen</i>	<i>In Armis</i>	<i>Te Caesar</i>	<i>Amando</i>	<i>Te laudat</i>	<i>Pietas</i>		
	<i>Tu fortis</i>	<i>In undis</i>	<i>Te Iulius</i>	<i>Te Gallus</i>	<i>Et ornat</i>	<i>Te vincit</i>		
<i>Tu habus</i>	<i>Achilles</i>	<i>Te Hispanus</i>	<i>Vario</i>	<i>Te Molliandus</i>	<i>In Armis</i>	<i>Cui fulget</i>		
	<i>Vlyssa</i>	<i>Te Elector</i>	<i>Dulci</i>	<i>Compo</i>	<i>Dux frater</i>	<i>In Aula</i>		
<i>lympi</i>	<i>Romanus</i>	<i>Patrio</i>	<i>Carmine celebret</i>	<i>Docto</i>	<i>Burgundus</i>	<i>Vbique</i>		
	<i>Amonis</i>	<i>Te Rhenus</i>	<i>Multo</i>	<i>Modulo</i>	<i>Te Nicrus</i>	<i>Amica</i>		
<i>Tu rdus</i>	<i>Amazon</i>	<i>Neuburgus</i>	<i>Lato</i>	<i>Germanus</i>	<i>In ore</i>	<i>Cui splendet</i>		
	<i>Pignus</i>	<i>Ad atra</i>	<i>Te Flander</i>	<i>Te Boius</i>	<i>Abundans</i>	<i>Cui ridet</i>		
<i>olstri</i>	<i>Te extollit</i>	<i>Honoris</i>	<i>Te Parsul</i>	<i>Adornans</i>	<i>Cui apparet</i>	<i>Bonitas</i>		
	<i>Petrus</i>	<i>Te caesar</i>	<i>Anhelans</i>	<i>In oris</i>	<i>Cui lucret</i>	<i>Facies</i>		
<i>uephia tu</i>	<i>Virtus</i>	<i>Cui satur</i>	<i>Ovanti</i>	<i>Cui acclamat</i>	<i>Probitas</i>	<i>Gloria Lusitani</i>		

Labyrinthus Metncus Seren<sup>ae</sup> Reginae Portugalliae apertur, in quo 14:996.480 hoc est quatuordecim miliones nongenta nonaginta sex milia, quadragenta, & octoginta versus, sine carmina legi possunt, legenda à centro ad angulos, totidemque ab angulis ad centrum.

Figure 3. Labyrinth poem. António Alvares da Cunha, 1673.



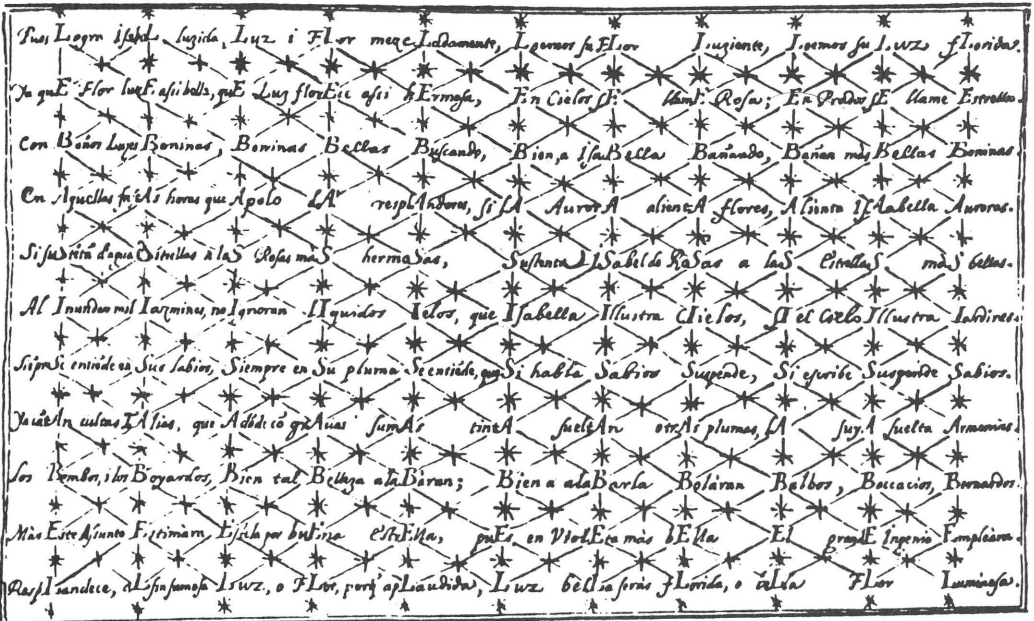
## Letter Labyrinths

Letter labyrinths are poems in which there have been inserted (and emphasized by means of capitals or color printing) certain letters that correspond to a special intent within the composition, usually the name of the person to whom the piece is dedicated or, perhaps, a special votive sentence. In the case of Figure 4, a poem by the celebrated Portuguese commentator on Camoës, Manuel de Faria e Sousa, the inserted word is ISABEL, the name of the lady in whose honor the poem was written and which in itself constitutes an autonomous pattern poem, as the author himself points out<sup>6</sup> and as we can confirm in Figure 4a.

L L L L L L L L L L L  
 E E E E E E E E E E E  
 B B B B B B B B B B B  
 A A A A A A A A A A A  
 S S S S S S S S S S S  
 I I I I I I I I I I I  
 S S S S S S S S S S S  
 A A A A A A A A A A A  
 B B B B B B B B B B B  
 E E E E E E E E E E E  
 L L L L L L L L L L L

Figure 4. Labyrinth poem. Manuel de Faria e Sousa, ca. 1648.

*Em eis el Labirinto de Isabel que ha de entrar do verso se diz en el capitulo [Aqui entra etc.]*



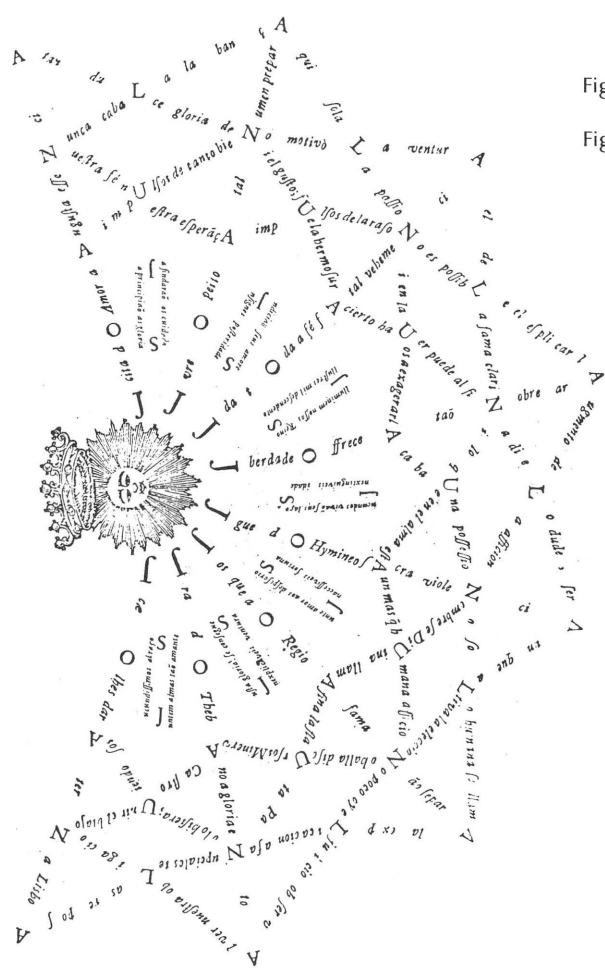
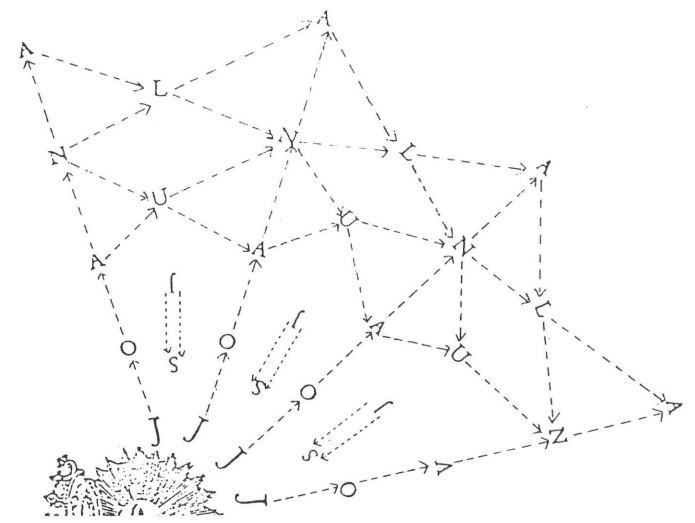


Figure 5. Labyrinth Epithalamium. Jerónimo Tavares Mascarenhas de Távora, 1738.

Figure 5a. Reading map for Labyrinth Epithalamium in Figure 5.



We are then confronted with a letter labyrinth which is a square poem having eleven characters, a *numero primo*, therefore, charged with symbolic meaning. The readings should start from the central line, where the letter *I* is found, and should proceed from there vertically up and down in each column, following the principle of an acrostic, and also diagonally from the center towards the corners. Besides this special reading, the poem as a whole is also meant to be read normally as a set of eleven stanzas, but other hidden paths such as permutations, inversions, and diagonal readings are also possible, the latter particularly, since they are suggested by the graphic support of the crossed lines. This type of composition is closely related to the technique of *versus intexti* or *verba intexta* found in European pattern poetry, at least since the work of Prophyrius Optatianus (fl. 325 AD), and it is interesting to see Manuel de Faria e Sousa clearly stating in the commentary of his own work that Prophyrius should be recognized as the father of baroque labyrinth poems,<sup>7</sup> an assertion that coincides with one made in our own times by Giovanni Polara.<sup>8</sup>

In Figure 5 we can see another eloquent demonstration of the inventiveness and complexity afforded by this type of labyrinth. The example is by Jerónimo Tavares Mascarenhas de Távora, a Portuguese poet who included it in his *Parabem Epithalamico*, published in 1738, to celebrate the wedding of Dom Luis de Castro and Dona Joana Perpétua de Bragança, a granddaughter of King Pedro II.<sup>9</sup> This letter labyrinth is written in two languages, Spanish and Portuguese, and their reading paths are indicated in Figure 5a where the actual poems have been erased.

Through this partial reading map it becomes clear how the names of the bride and of the bridegroom follow different paths: hers from the center towards the periphery, his from the periphery towards the center. Their names — JOANA and LUIS — are the inserted words around which are built the two poems that comprise the text: one around both names, another around just the letters *J* (inverted and functioning both as *J* and *I*) and *S* of the bridegroom's name. The first can be read following the paths indicated in dotted lines with arrows, starting from the center, with the letter *J* placed around the sun figure and proceeding towards the eight outer letters, *A*, but also following the lozenge detours marked. Reverse readings are possible as well. The second poem is strictly wrapped around the letters *J* and *S* of the name LUIS, which correspond to the first and last letters of each of its fourteen lines, in the middle of which they stand. The dotted lines with arrows indicate the direction of the reading, which is always towards the center.

### Cubic Labyrinths

Cubic labyrinths, as Rengifo describes them, are “a sort of letter labyrinth,” usually made out of a single line poem or couplet arranged on the page or sheet in such a way as to form a square. The reading is to start with the first letter, generally a well-emphasized capital placed at the top of the left hand side of the composition, and to continue right through the text — always left to right — until the last letter on the right-hand corner of the bottom line is reached. The reader will, therefore, be following a spiralling trajectory, since



what happens in this kind of labyrinth is such a full rotation that, at the end of the circuit, the line or couplet is completely reversed. Meanwhile we are, of course, also reading on the diagonal and along the edges of the square. The example in Figure 6 is Portuguese, possibly from the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup>

A variant of the cubic labyrinth is illustrated by the striking composition in Figure 7, also by a Portuguese but from the eighteenth century, in which we see the principle of the cubic poem taken as literally as it can be, for not only are the rotation and the subsequent inversion of the text there, but also the whole poem itself is designed as a cube, with its six parts spread out. This particular labyrinth is the third in a series composed to commemorate the birthday of Queen Maria Theresa of Austria and Hungary, and its wording is: *Felices annos o vive Maria Theresa*.<sup>11</sup>

Paschasius à S. Ioanne Evangelista (Paschasio de San Giovanni, no dates but seventeenth century) in his *Poësis Artificiosa*, which was printed in two editions at Herbopoli (Worms) by Eliae Michaëlis Zinck in 1668 and 1674, rather surprisingly does not mention the category of labyrinths, but he does include a chapter, with illustrations — *De Carmine Cubico* — in which he refers to the cubic poem with rotation reading which we know as *laberinto cubico*, along with other forms, such as the square letter labyrinth with its reading starting from the center, crosses, etc.

In spite of this, and more in accordance with Rengifo, in *A Experiência do Prodigio*, the square poems and the crosses, with their readings starting from the center, are to be found under the designation of “letter labyrinths.” The reason for this classification is based upon the fact that, up to the present moment and at least in the Iberian Peninsula, that particular type of text is not known to have been described by any authors or commentators as “cubic,” this indication seemingly always having been reserved for labyrinth poems with rotation reading. According to the classification proposed in that book (which has to be considered temporary since further discoveries in this field may force me to change it) this kind of letter labyrinth, usually displaying only one word or a very limited text which has not been inserted or superimposed over another, is normally shaped as a square — a *carmen quadratum* — but can be found in the form of a cross. In the case of the square, and as far as the reading is concerned, the labyrinth is divided into four wings, all symmetrical, each one being the inverse of the other, in mirror image, as can be seen in Figure 8. The reading must start at the center — the letter C here — and it includes the vertical and diagonal paths where the same text is always to be found, in this case the words *Commentarios Hymnologicos*. This particular example was printed in red and black by a Portuguese author of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

When the composition is cruciform, several possibilities occur, of which we shall consider two. First, the usual four-sided division of the text, as in Figure 9;<sup>13</sup> and second, as in Figure 10,<sup>14</sup> where in each branch of the cross a different plea is added to the name of IESUS. Thus, starting from the central I, we can read, in order, for example:

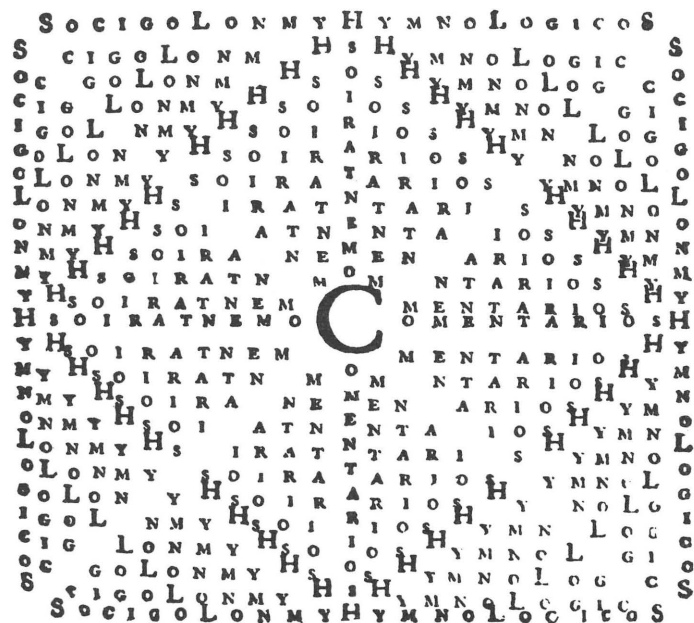


Figure 8. Labyrinth. Fr. José da Assuncao, 1738.

*EU SOU O MAIS EMPENHADO.*

o d a h n h a d o  
 a h n e n h a  
 n e p e n  
 p m p  
 m e m  
 e s e  
 s i s  
 i a i  
 a m a  
 m o m  
 o u o  
 u o u  
 o f o  
 a h n  
 h n e p m e s i a m o u o f u f o u o m a i s e m p e n h  
 n e p m e s i a m o u o f u **E** u f o u o m a i s e m p e n  
 h n e p m e s i a m o u o f u f o u o m a i s e m p e n h  
 a h n  
 d a  
 o  
 o f o  
 u o u  
 o u o  
 m o m  
 a m a  
 i a i  
 s i s  
 e s e  
 m e m  
 p m p  
 n e p e n  
 a h n e n h a  
 o d a h n h a d o

*Do mesmo.*

Figure 9. Labyrinth. Fr. José da Silva da Natividade, 1743.

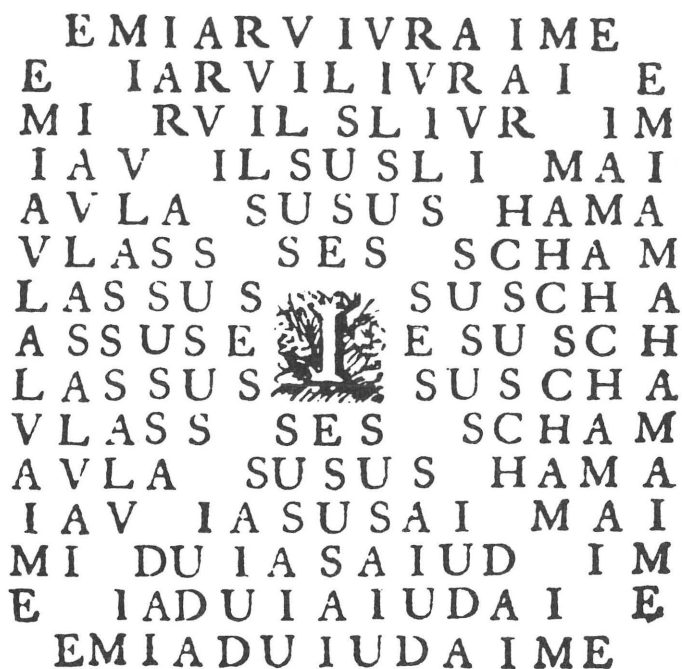


Figure 10. Labyrinth. José Pereira Velozo, 1688.

- up: IESUS LIVRAIME (JESUS DELIVER ME)
- right: IESUS CHAMAIME (JESUS CALL ME)
- left: IESUS SALVAIME (JESUS SAVE ME)
- down: IESUS AIUDAIME (JESUS HELP ME)

Each line can be read up, down, right, or left and is always accompanied by its mirror image.

In this type of labyrinth the reading pattern can be further complicated, and I have found cases where each line of each branch of the cross presents a different text, making the composition a real maze and requiring a considerable amount of dexterity on the part of the reader.

The types of labyrinth poems presented in this paper seem to be the basic ones, or at least the most frequently produced models, for the Iberian peninsula during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but similar examples can also be found in the rest of Europe and Latin America. However, other compositions, which can only be described as hybrid or mixed forms, are also very frequent, thus making their accurate classification rather problematic.

# A O SENHOR CONDE DE VILLAFLORES.

*Labyrinth: Egrina: Soneto: Encomiastico, Acrostico, Anagrammatico: em vinte, e oito Anagramas rigorosos. He cada circulo hum verso, cada verso dous Anagramas. Compoese as letras pelloz numeros, e os numeros pellas letras, da periferia deste Orbe.*

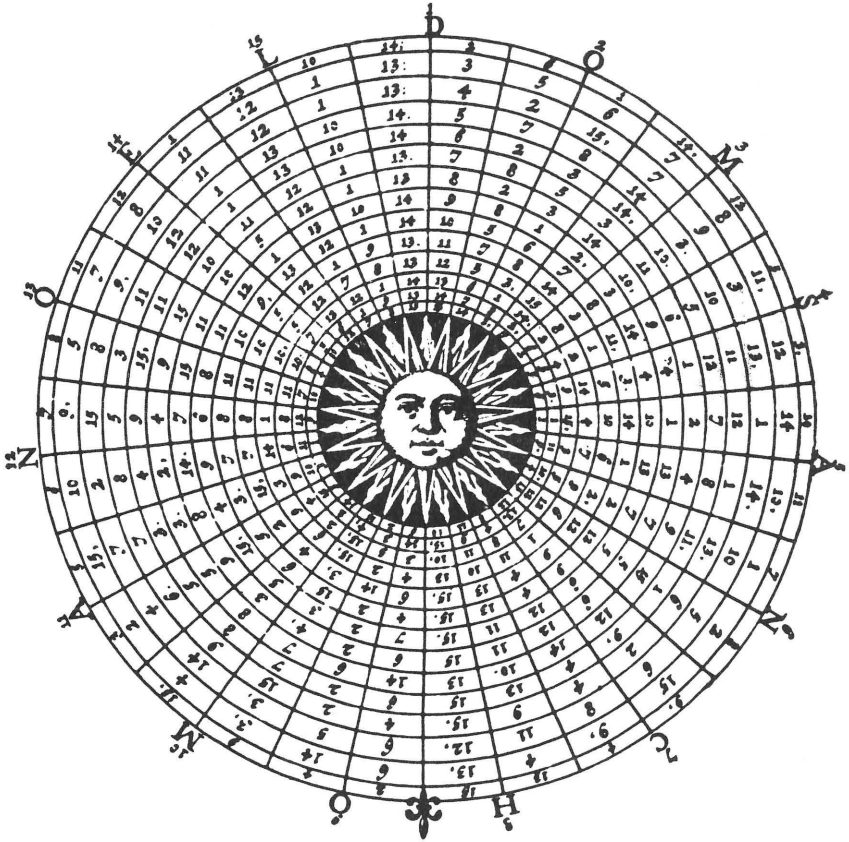


Figure 11. Labyrinth sonnet. António Alvares da Cunha, 1673.

A good example of this type of mixed text can be seen in Figure 11, a seventeenth-century Portuguese composition also dedicated to the Conde de Villafior.<sup>15</sup> The reading instructions are on the title: "Each circle is a verse, each verse two anagrams. The letters are composed by the numbers and the numbers by the letter, on the periphery of this globe."

Following the instructions we can read around the outer circle the words "DOM SANCHO MANOEL." To each of the letters of this name a number is attributed, so that we have the numbers from 1 to 15, corresponding to the letters over which they are placed. In the inner circles those numbers are to be retranslated into letters and, if the reader does so, he will decipher the riddle and end up with the announced sonnet, in which the name DOM SANCHO MANOEL is found in an acrostic and in the twenty-eight anagrams (two in each line) formed by the combination of letters in those words.<sup>16</sup>

To conclude this brief introduction to the charms and difficulties of reading the peninsular baroque labyrinth poems, I must point out that the examples presented are only a limited sample of an immensely vast production of many, many authors, covering centuries of repetition and reinvention of basic forms which gave birth to an infinite number of variants. In any case, whatever the type may be, the baroque labyrinth poems have a long and illustrious past and in the history of the creative mind they represent an outstanding effort to encompass in a single composition a whole universe of sense and sensibility through the artistic multiplication of meaning. In our days this kind of achievement is beginning to attract the consideration that it fully deserves.

1. In all editions the work is attributed to Juan Díaz Rengifo; however, the true author seems to be Diego García Rengifo, the brother of Juan. For more information on this subject as well as on the subsequent additions to the work, see Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España* (2a ed. Santander: S. A. de Artes Gráficas, 1947), v. 2, p. 215.

2. The baroque period in Portugal is generally considered to extend from the latter part of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, thus comprising part of the so-called manneristic period as well. On this subject, see Vítor Manuel Pires de Aguiar e Silva, *Maneirismo e Barroco na Poesia Lírica Portuguesa* (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Românicos, 1971).

3. Ana Hatherly, *A Experiência do Prodígio — Bases teóricas e antologia de textos-visuais portuguesas dos séculos XVII e XVIII* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional- Casa da Moeda, 1983). Hereafter cited as Hatherly (1983).

4. Hatherly (1983) fig. 27.

5. Hatherly (1983) fig. 28.

6. This poem, printed here in the autograph version, was first published by Arthur L. F. Askins in his "Manuel de Faria e Sousa's *Fuente de Aganipe*: the Unprinted Seventh Part," in *Florilegium Hispanicum: Medieval and Golden Age Studies presented to Dorothy Clotelle Clarke* (Madison: Medieval Seminar of Hispanic Studies, 1982), 245-77. It is also included in Hatherly (1983) as fig. 29 and is discussed in my article "Labirintos da

Parte VII da *Fuente de Aganipe* de Manuel de Faria e Sousa," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português* v. 21 (Paris: Centro Cultural Português, 1985). Hereafter cited as Hatherly (1985).

7. Hatherly (1985).

8. Giovanni Polara, *Ricerce sulla tradizione manoscritta di Publilio Optaziano Porfirio* (Salerno: Libreria Internazionale Editrice, 1971), preface.

9. The complete title of the work is, following the title page, *Parabem Epithalamico que nas felicissimas Nupcias do Illmo. e Exmo. Marquez o Senhor Dom Luiz e Duqueza a Senhora D. Joana Perpetua de Bragança, Recitao as Villas de seus Estados / Pelo Doutor Jeronymo Tavares de Mascarenhas de Tavora, Academico Applicado / Lisboa Occidental, Na Officina Rita Cassiana, Anno 1738*. Not included in Hatherly (1983).

10. Hatherly (1983) fig. 24.

11. Hatherly (1983) fig. 22.

12. Hatherly (1983) fig. 12.

13. Hatherly (1983) fig. 4.

14. Hatherly (1983) fig. 2.

15. Hatherly (1983) fig. 50.

16. I was fortunate enough to have found the riddle solved for me in an eighteenth century Portuguese manuscript, the "Declaracao do Soneto acróstico, anagramático e enigmático que D. António Alvares da Cunha, Secretário da Academia dos Generosos fez ao Conde de Villafior, D. Sancho Manoel. Decifrado pelo Padre J[oao] B[aptista] de Castro em 2 de Fevereiro de 1720" who, as this Portuguese title tells us, deciphered the enigma on February 2, 1720, precisely on the day when that author, who later became a well known critic, turned twenty years of age. His interpretation is published on p. 271 of *A Experiência do Prodígio* but here I am reproducing the actual poem that results as well:

D

O Onde nam macho o sol o sol manchandome;

M mancha nem dolo so nem sol mo achando:

S sol como de manhan nam escolho, mando:

A achem. Mando no sol Solon chamandome

N Nome mancha do sol no cham. Sol ondome

C chamando sol nem o encham o sol. Mando

H homem os do cannal nos mostre chamando

O oh do mesmo cannal com al sonhandome,

M Mancha medo no sol, sol nam, chamo onde

A achem damno no sol, nem sol chamando

N nam ilho escondam o sol, nome dam ancho

O Onde o sol mancham, mal o sol ham conde

E echo nam dam no sol em sol manchando

L lem coando sonham no Leam Dom Sancho.