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Secrecy and the Rhetoric of Diplomacy on Calderón's Stage and in Count Pötting's Diary

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The Ambassador at the Theatre. Secrecy and the Rhetoric of Diplomacy on Calderón's Stage and in Count Pötting's Diary¹

WOLFRAM AICHINGER
Universität Wien

Quelle a été l'influence du théâtre sur les stratégies de communication de l'ambassadeur des Habsbourgs à la cour d'Espagne, à une époque où la dissimulation était devenue un outil indispensable ? L'article aborde cette question en s'appuyant sur les informations fournies par le journal du comte Franz E. Pötting : routine des entretiens quotidiens et soirées au théâtre, dominé par le génie de Calderón.

Mots-clés : ambassadeur Pötting, cour d'Espagne, 1663-1673, Calderón, dissimulation, communication.

¿Cuál fue la influencia del teatro sobre las estrategias comunicativas del embajador imperial en la corte de España, en una época en que la disimulación se había convertido en arma indispensable? El estudio aborda esta cuestión aprovechando los datos contenidos en el diario del conde Franz E. Pötting (1663-1673), tanto sobre la rutina de sus negociaciones diarias como sobre las tardes en un teatro dominado por el genio de Calderón.

Palabras claves: embajador Pötting, corte de España, 1663-1673, Calderón, disimulación, comunicación.

What was the influence of the theatre on the communication strategies of the Habsburg ambassador to the Spanish Court, at a time when dissimulation had become an indispensable tool? The article tackles that question by using information drawn from Count Franz E. Pötting's journal: routine of daily interviews and evenings at the theatre, dominated by Calderón's genius.

Keywords: ambassador Pötting, Spanish court, 1663-1673, Calderón, dissimulation, communication.

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to Fritz Peter Kirsch

I. INTRODUCTION: FICTION AND COGNITION

If someone told us they had met Apollo or Diana or Semiramis or Charles the Great at some public or private place – without adding that it was in a movie or a theatre or an art gallery – we would consider him mad. There are good reasons for keeping reality and fiction separate in our descriptions of the world. And yet, this is not the way our mind operates. Once we have read a novel or watched a play or an opera, its characters, their deeds, thoughts and words occupy some space in our brain and memory. Consequently, they mingle with other words, thoughts and stored images, whatever their ontological status may be. They interfere in these highly chaotic, strange and uncontrollable activities which we label as remembering, imagining, dreaming or thinking².

We should therefore conceive of the relationship between theatre and political life in a non-trivial way. A murder committed on stage does not entail serious consequences outside the theatre – there is little doubt about that. Theatre belongs to spaces with their own rules and their own logic of communication. Nevertheless, they maintain a complex relationship with the surrounding non-theatrical, non-fictional worlds and there is always the possibility that elements migrate from drama to life and vice versa.

II. COUNT PÖTTING AT THE COMEDIES

This is the perspective from which I want to look at Franz Eusebius Pötting, count, who served as ambassador at the court of Madrid from 1663 to 1673³. Pötting belonged to a family rooted in Styria, Austria, elevated to earldom in 1637. He maintained a close and surprisingly cordial relationship with the emperor Leopold I (1640-1705), both sharing a taste for art, theatre and books, both strongly influenced by the spirit of the Jesuit Order. The ambassador's entries about private or public performances in Madrid have been used as a most valuable source for the social history of drama and his contacts with editors, purchases of prints and libraries have received the scholarly attention they deserve⁴. My aim here is a different one. I shall examine connections

2. Cf. Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England, Harvard University Press, 1986.

3. Miguel Nieto Nuño (ed.), *Diario del conde de Pötting, embajador del Sacro Imperio en Madrid (1664-1674)*, 2 tomos, Madrid, Biblioteca Diplomática Española Sección Fuentes 1, 1990, 1993. In the following, references to the volume and page of the diary will be given in brackets. Quotations will be rendered in modernized orthography. About Pötting's genealogy and career at the courts of Vienna and Madrid cf. *ibid.*, p. XXXIX-LIII.

4. Cf. Nieto Nuño, *op. cit.*, I, p. LI; Don Cruickshank, «The Library of Count of Pötting», *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vol. VI, parte 2, 1973, p. 110-114. Cf. also

between stage and social life, not so much by identifying analogous themes and motifs, but by working out patterns of interaction and communication that underlie and guide the development of human plights onstage. Theatre does not copy life in an obvious manner. But it is not isolated from the «real» world either. Rather, I will argue, it constitutes a subsystem of social life, which is therefore part of the world and related to other subsystems in manifold ways. So readers of this paper might get some interesting insights into the strange communicative world of the 17th century. Furthermore and more importantly still, I should like to make a case for a complex understanding of dramatic art, an understanding that goes beyond the boundaries sometimes set by academic disciplines.

In his diary, Pötting frequently reports his visits to the theatres of Madrid, the number of which depended on the time of year, with peaks in carnival and after Lent and a complete absence of references in periods of mourning. There are also some allusions to performances at the court of Vienna. The Count gives a number of concrete titles: *El postrer duelo de España*, *El Faetonte*, *El conde de Saldaña*, *El amor puesto en razón*, *El secreto a voces*, *El galán más valiente y discreto*, *Apolo y Climene*, *Agradecer y no amar*. In some cases, he adds the poet's name, whereby his predilection for Calderón is evident. Occasionally, he only mentions the subject (e.g. *La historia de Tobías*) or refers to the genre of the play that was performed, as was the case with the *autos sacramentales* on Corpus Christi day. He includes remarks on the audience, where and with whom he was positioned in the theatre; he notices acts of respect or disrespect in the unfolding of courtly protocol and incidents that could turn a night at the comedies into a scandal with lengthy aftermaths and a strong dose of latent violence (II, 205, 209, 216 n. 258, also II, 191 n. 231). He frequently adds some judgement regarding the quality of the play or the staging and whether it was prepared by professionals or, as happened in some cases, by the servants of noblemen or ambassadors, and also whether he attended on his own or accompanied by his wife. He comments on issues of patronage, and speculates about the secret intentions that led some prominent member of court to go to great expense for a performance given to honour the royal family⁵. Two examples may provide an impression of how Pötting wrote on theatre. (Readers who would like to look for more detailed information will find an exhaustive survey in Miguel Nieto Nuño's study on the subject)⁶. In January 1672, on the 30th, Pötting records the following entertainment:

Fuime a la gran comedia en el Retiro, cuyo asunto era Fieras ablanda el amor, aludiendo a las fuerzas y flaquezas de Hércules; el teatro era bueno y costoso, la representación no se hizo mal, pero las tramoyas salieron muy toscas y manuales. Dicen haber costado al príncipe

Arnold G. Reichenberger, «The Counts Harrach and the Spanish Theater», in *Homenaje a Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino*, vol. 2, Madrid, Castalia, 1966, p. 97-103.

5. Cf. Nieto Nuño, *Diario*, *passim*.

6. Miguel Nieto Nuño, «Noticia de comedias representadas en Viena y Madrid», in M. Nieto Nuño, *Fondos hispánicos en la Biblioteca Nacional de Viena*, Madrid, Ed. de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Colección «Tesis Doctorales», n. 47 / 89, 1989, p. 116-158.

[de Astillano] esta fiesta con los presentes que dio grandiosos a Sus Majestades al pie de 200.000 ducados de vellón, liberalidad de todos censurada y más del sujeto que se conoce no ser demasiado sobrado. Al embajador de Venecia le dio en esta comedia un fiero y lastimoso accidente, que hubo de retirarse de allí (II, 245).

On the 31st Pötting adds: «*la condesa fue a ver la misma comedia convidada por un membrete de la Princesa de Astillano*» (II, 256)⁷. Some months earlier, on October 15th 1671, the Austrian count combines praise to Spanish dramaturgy and ladies with a somewhat resentful comment on the Spanish national character:

La condesa y yo estuvimos a la comedia del marqués de Liche, cuyo asunto fue muy bueno y misterioso, sobre el asunto poético de Apolo y Climene, hecha nuevamente por el Calderón, mayor poeta hoy en día en España. Topé allá [a] los demás embajadores asimismo convidados. Estuvimos detrás de una celosía muy decentemente. Hubo grandioso concurso de damas, hasta ciento. Y esta ha sido la primera fiesta a que me hallé convidado todos estos nueve años de mi embajada, de donde se infiere lo mucho que esta altiva nación se esmera de agasajar a los forasteros, y cuán justo fuera si en otras partes se les pagasen con igual cortesía (II, 224).

III. PÖTTING'S MISSION IN MADRID

When Pötting arrived in Madrid in 1663, his main purpose was to obtain Spanish support for the emperor's war against the Ottomans. As for dynastic concerns, the Austrian ambassador had to do whatever was in his power to advance the voyage of the Spanish infanta Margarita María (1651-1673) to Vienna and thus conclude a longstanding marriage project with the German emperor Leopold I, Margarita's uncle. But the Spanish king Philip IV died in 1665, exhausted from a lifelong service to Venus and Mars. Subsequently, it proved difficult to overcome the resistance of the powerful parties at court who did not wish for a closer alliance of the two branches of the Habsburg family. Nevertheless, in autumn 1666, the goal was achieved and the very young empress arrived in Vienna.

Pötting's mission thereafter did not become easier. Apart from shifting alliances on European battlefields, the main issues at stake were these: How to deal with a queen regent, Mariana (1634-1696) who lacked determination and therefore relied on her confessor and later her secretaries and favourites? Consequently, how to come to terms with the different parties at court, at a time when neither Spanish nor Viennese mutual loyalty could be taken for granted? How to cope with an illegitimate and talented son, don Juan José de

7. Interestingly, on the 30th of March, 1672, in a letter to Leopold, Pötting relates that Astillano and Eliche were engaged in a competition to become the prince's favourites (II, 255 n. 302).

Austria (1629-1679), who constantly threatened to march upon Madrid, to banish the queen and to establish his own rule –a scenario that became a reality in January 1677⁸.

Finally, how to deal with a prince, the future king Carlos II (1661-1700), who lacked the physical and mental capacities required for a ruler –a fact however that could not be commented on openly at court (II, 304)– and whose frequent illnesses triggered preparations for a struggle of succession in Vienna and Paris?

Some of the scenes painted in Pötting's diary give a good impression of the prevailing atmosphere at court. On November 1st 1672 he writes: «*Por la tarde me fui a la ante-cámara de la reina, adonde no topé más alma viviente que un triste mayordomo y un par de guardas, famosa corte real*» (II, 303). It is the very atmosphere we find in the paintings of Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo and even more so in Juan Carreño de Miranda. So Pötting, to be sure, carried out his mission at a time when all human efforts proved futile in the face of the disasters worked by illness, death and the weakness of aristocratic bodies worn out by more than two hundred years of close endogamic marriage.

Even Pötting's greatest achievement, the marriage of Leopold and Margarita María, was tainted by time and its obstinate work of destruction. Margarita endured six pregnancies but only one daughter survived to adulthood. The last of these pregnancies was probably one cause amongst others for the empress's early death. It is interesting to note that the figures who were in the foreground of this scenario were all closely related to the late Philip IV: His first daughter had become Queen of France, his second daughter empress in Vienna, his son was Prince of Spain, his nephews Emperor of Germany and King of France respectively, his bastard son was promoted by opposing factions at court and secretly setting up a network of spies and supporters.

Pötting's diary gives us an insight into the everyday details and facets of the ambassador's endeavours; it reflects, as Nieto Nuño states on the cover of the second volume of his edition, «*el lento discurrir de la vida en la revuelta corte de Carlos II*». In addition to religious service and excursions to the countryside, this life was made up of two activities: letter writing and visiting. Any month you choose in the ambassador's diary will give you entries like these: January 1st, 1671: «*Vino a visitarme el duque de Alcalá*». January 2nd: «*Visitome con mucho cariño el conde de Peñaranda Bracamonte. Visité a mi priora de la Encarnación, sor Ana María de la Concepción, condesa de Aranda. Visité al príncipe de Astillano*». January 3rd: «*Estuvo conmigo el marqués de Mondéjar. Comió conmigo el padre Carlos Isnardi*». January 4th: «*Vino a verme el conde de Alba. [...] Estuvo conmigo el conductor de los embajadores*» (II, 169).

8. Cf. for a lively and detailed description of these events «Diario de todo lo sucedido en Madrid» [...], in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España por el marqués de la Fuensanta del Valle y d. José Sancho Rayón*, tomo LXVII, Madrid, Miguel Ginesta, 1877, p.71-133.

One great value of Pötting's diary lies in the fact that it does not only summarize these meetings. In addition, Pötting's text informs about the degree of familiarity between the people concerned, their attitude, the emotions that undergirded their encounter and, above all, what he thought about it in his private realm. Dress codes and gestures were just as important as words and often there was some microdrama implied, a drama with a rich emotional and intentional subtext; therefore the circumstances of the meeting were highly significant and charged with symbolism—just as if they were encounters on the stage of a theatre. On August 1st 1671, the Austrian ambassador writes: «Pagué al conde de Peñaranda su visita de rebozo en la misma moneda, topándole tan desnudo⁹ como él a mí: amor con amor se paga» (II, 208). Interestingly, Pötting comments on the situation by referring to a maxim that was well known to novelists and playwrights¹⁰.

IV. COUNT PÖTTING AND COUNT PEÑARANDA

Things defined as real become real in their consequences. Therefore, however subjective and biased Pötting's reports may be, he provides important insights into the frames of interpretation applied by a diplomat in the Baroque age. His relationship with the aforementioned Count Peñaranda provides a good case in point. Let us briefly examine how their relationship developed over the years. Don Gaspar de Bracamonte y Guzmán, Count of Peñaranda, was promoted to high political charges by Olivares and carried out essential diplomatic missions in Central Europe. After the fall of the queen's confessor, father Nithard, in 1669, he was entrusted with Spain's foreign policy (I, 65-66 n. 145), thus holding a position of utmost importance at the court of Madrid.

When Pötting in November 1664 sends a messenger to ask for an appointment, Peñaranda can spare no time for him: «*He mandado a pedir*

9. «*Desnudo*» in this context means «unprepared», «not properly dressed for the occasion and according to the visitor's status». Cf. Laura Oliván Santaliestra, *Mariana de Austria en la encrucijada política del siglo XVII*, Memoria para optar al grado de doctor [en línea], Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2006 [consulted on 21st of March, 2016] p. 210-211. URL: <http://eprints.ucm.es/8054/1/T29305.pdf>, p. 210-211.

10. Cf. Marcella Trambaioli, «Amor con amor se paga», ovvero la fortuna di una massima petrarchesca nel teatro del Siglo de Oro (Lope e Calderón)», in *La penna di Venere. Scritture dell'amore nelle culture iberiche*. Atti del XX Convegno dell'Associazione Ispanisti Italiani (Firenze 15-17 marzo 2001), a cura di Domenico Antonio Cusato e Loretta Frattale, Messina, Andrea Lippolis, 2002, p. 339-349. Trambaioli traces the saying in Siglo de Oro theatre (*La Celestina*, *La quinta de Florencia* by Lope de Vega, *Para vencer a amor, querer vencerle*, *La fiera*, *el rayo y la piedra* by Calderón, but there does not seem to be a play by this title as Nieto Nuño (II, 208 n. 248) holds. However, in the *carta dedicatoria* to the *Cuarta parte de sus comedias*, Calderón mentions the play *Amor con amor se obliga*, wrongly attributed to him (cf. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Comedias*, IV. *Cuarta parte de comedias*, ed. Sebastian Neumeister, Madrid, Biblioteca Castro, 2010, p. 6). Alonso de Castillo Solórzano wrote a novella with the title *Amor con amor se paga* (cf. Begoña Ripoll, *La novela barroca. Catálogo bio-bibliográfico (1620-1700)*, Salamanca, Ed. Universidad de Salamanca, 1991, p. 177).

la hora del conde Peñaranda para visitarle. Excusose con sus ocupaciones, que es notable cortesía española»¹¹ (I, 70). In February 1665, Pötting reports to Vienna that three ministers presently exercise all power in Madrid, and two of them, Castrillo and Peñaranda, do not show any inclination towards Austrian imperial interests (I, 92 n. 179). In response to this, the emperor charges his ambassador to use his influence upon the queen and her counsellors, especially to «penetrate» Peñaranda's intentions (I, 95 n. 183). Among other things, Leopold feared that the French party might obstruct his marriage with Margarita María, the Spanish infanta¹². At the start of 1666, Pötting reports that Peñaranda continued with his impertinent attitude (I, 170-171 n. 289). In February 1668, he states that the world would be better off were Peñaranda not born in it (I, 357). The emperor seemed to agree: that very same year, in March, he asked his sister –in epistolary form– to send Peñaranda to a famous mental institution in Toledo (I, 361 n. 568).

But times change and so did political conveniences. On October 20th 1669, Pötting notes: «*Después de comer salí al campo y encontré al conde de Peñaranda, que con su insólita cortesía hizo parar su coche, hablando buen rato conmigo muy civil y amigablemente. No sea según el refrán italiano chi te carezza piu che suole etc.*»¹³ (II, 67). 1670 started with good intentions: «*A primero, miércoles: Visité al conde de Peñaranda para ver si con los principios de este año hallaría en él más cariño y más saludables dictámenes en su idea, quiera Dios darme a mí el acierto, y a él buen influjo; recibiome cortésmente, el tiempo descubrirá lo demás*» (II, 85). And indeed, human relations improved and by 1673 they reached an astounding level of cordiality. January 1673: «*me volví cargado [de una visita] de muchos abrazos*» (II, 319-320); February, the same year: «*mil zalamerías, de las que acostumbra*» (II, 324); 23rd of July: «*mil agasajos*» (II, 364); December, 1673: «*brazos abiertos y mil buenas expresiones*» (II, 402). Despite this apparent rapprochement, the undercurrent of irony and suspicion never ceased: In October 1670, Pötting informed his emperor that Peñaranda treated him politely but carried don Juan, who was Philip's illegitimate son and queen Mariana's fierce opponent, in his heart (II, 149 n. 187). In October 1672, he confirmed Leopold's thesis about the minister being «*completamente francés*» (II, 298 n. 349). In July 1673 he perceives the cunning Spaniard as a «*fino volpón*» (II, 363), whereas the hearty goodbye after a meeting in January of that year, evokes the mental image of the prince and patron of all traitors, Judas Iscariot: «*Visité al conde de Peñaranda, y me volví cargado de muchos abrazos; osculo filium hominis etc.*»¹⁴ (II, 319-320).

11. Some days later Pötting writes a lengthy complaint about this incident to Vienna (I, 71 n. 154).

12. Cf. for instance I, 68 n. 150, I, 74 n. 160.

13. I corrected the erroneous transcription in Nieto Nuño, as Pötting obviously refers to the proverb «Chi fa più carezze che non suole, o t'ha gabbato o gabbar ti vuole» which could be translated as «Whoever caresses you more than usually, either has deceived you or wants to deceive you».

14. Cf. «Jesus autem dixit illi: Juda, osculo Filium hominis tradis? / But Jesus said unto him,

It seems noteworthy that both Pötting and Peñaranda thought each other capable of secretly conniving, nay conspiring with the King of France and both had good reasons to do so¹⁵. In March 1673, Pötting found himself in a situation of utmost embarrassment —«*quiera Dios sacarme con bien de este barranco, porque temo ha de levantar mucha polvareda*»— when Leopold's allies at the court of Madrid learned about secret treaties Austria had agreed upon with France without previous consultation of the Spanish queen and her ministers¹⁶. The frequent and highly ritualized mutual assurance that both branches of the house of Habsburg, with a brother ruling in Vienna and his sister in Madrid¹⁷, had to watch over the glory of the dynasty, seemed hardly reconcilable with political, military and economic interests.

V. CALDERONIAN SPEECH ACTS AND DIPLOMACY

Let us now turn to the theatre and the way it features human communication. As Elias L. Rivers pointed out, Siglo de Oro drama is more than the imitation of human action. It is more than a story told visually through the concatenation of events. Words seem as important as deeds. Lope de Vega, Mira de Amescua and more so Calderón, in their plays repeatedly explore the way characters interact through language and create «possible» or «real worlds» while they communicate¹⁸. Therefore, drama does not only unfold through action; it very often develops out of speech acts. After Basilio has informed his subjects about the existence of a son, Segismundo, kept in prison in the mountains, everything changes at the court of Poland and in Calderón's *La vida es sueño*.

Thus, even though Jupiter, Apollo and Clymene are probably products of human imagination and the Prince of Poland or the Duchess of Parma turn into fictitious entities as soon as their plights are dealt with in a play, they can teach a lesson about possible ways of arguing, negotiating, deceiving, resolving dilemmas and eliciting secrets. In order to be able to speculate about the range of this influence, we need to carry out a microanalysis of both the everyday tasks of the ambassador and the dramas they attended and also read in print. As far as I can see, not very much has been done in this field of investigation¹⁹.

Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?» (Vulgate/ King James Bible, Luke 22: 48).

15. Cf. for instance I, 66 n. 146 or II, 150 n. 190.

16. Cf. for the Franco-Austrian relationship I, XLVII and Jesús María Usunáriz, *España y sus tratados internacionales, 1516-1700*, Barañáin, EUNSA, 2006, p. 426 y 434.

17. Cf. for example I, 318.

18. Elias L. Rivers, «Written Poetry and Oral Speech Acts in Calderón's Plays», in *Aureum Saeculum Hispanicum. Beiträge zu Texten des Siglo de Oro, Festschrift für Hans Flasche zum 70. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1983, p. 271-284. Cf. Michel Jarrety, *La poétique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2003, p. 47.

19. Cf. however: Hilaire Kallendorf, *Conscience on Stage: The Comedia as Casuistry in Early Modern Spain*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007; María M. Carrión, *Subject Stages: Marriage, Theatre and the Law in Early Modern Spain*, Toronto, Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 2010.

A detailed analysis of significant scenes in Calderón may prove that this is not just speculation. They all contain speech acts of the kind any ambassador had to use in his business, such as: subjecting somebody to an interrogatory, offering a reward to a prospective spy, accusing an ally for lack of loyalty (or secrecy), defending oneself against accusations of «double crossing», confronting somebody with an invented scandalous fact in order to observe and study his reaction to it. Obvious as this may seem in a diplomatic context, theorists of communication, occasionally working on a simplistic model of communication as the transfer of information, tend to underrate these «secondary» uses of language²⁰.

Let us take a closer look at two situations and the kind of communication involved. The first example stems from the first act of *El postrer duelo de España*. This is a play which Calderón most likely penned between 1651 and 1653²¹ and which Pötting saw performed on April 27th 1665. It is set in Zaragoza in the year of 1522, at the time of King Charles I of Spain; one don Pedro Torrellas meets one don Jerónimo de Ansa in a courtly ambience, both are in love with the same lady without being aware of this coincidence. In the course of their conversation Pedro finds out that Jerónimo is his rival but does not show or state this recognition. Jerónimo in turn knows from a servant that there is a competitor around but as he fully trusts his friend Pedro, he asks him to watch over Violante's street and to report the passing of any male devotee²². Regardless of the intrigue of love thus set in motion by Calderón, this passage is a typical example of what dialogue is all about in Calderón: people engage in an exchange of information. The amount of information given depends on the degree of love, friendship, kinship or loyalty their relation is based on, on one side, and on the secrecy and loyalty they owe to others on the other. Pedro cannot reveal the name of his lover because that would compromise her honour. As truth is hardly ever fully confessed, interlocutors remain confined to their particular and fragmentary versions of the unfolding story. Many times, they are well aware of this fact and have recourse to all kinds of (rhetorical) strategies in order to find out about true ongoings and true intentions. The search for private letters or the employment of spies are just the most obvious ones.

But there are more sophisticated methods. The following one can be found in the second act of *El secreto a voces* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Pötting watched a performance of this comedy of intrigue on April 12th 1668 in the

20. Cf. Paolo Fabbri, «Todos somos agentes dobles», *Revista de Occidente*, n° 374-375, Julio-Agosto 2012: *El secreto*, p. 113-133. Everard Nithard, confessor of queen Mariana and in charge of government for some years, partly owed his power to his acute sense of psychology. He studied the character of whoever served his interests in order to foresee and prevent action (cf. Nieto Nuño, I, 8 n. 7). As for the baroque concept of «honorable dissimulation» cf. Giovanni Macchia, *Il teatro delle passioni*, Milano, Adelphi, 1993, p. 133-147.

21. Cf. Don W. Cruickshank, *Don Pedro Calderón*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 226, p. 312-313.

22. Cf. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Comedias, IV. Cuarta parte de comedias*, ed. Sebastian Neumeister, Madrid, Biblioteca Castro, 2010, p. 17-35.

Corral de la Cruz and qualified it as a «*muy buena comedia de un duque de Mantua y la duquesa de Parma*» (I, 375)²³. In our scene, the very same Duchess of Parma that Pötting refers to, Flérída by name, summons her secretary, Federico, and, adopting an attitude of dignified state-womanliness accuses him of a secret conspiracy with her «worst enemy». There is no such conspiracy underway. Nevertheless, while Federico is trying to defend himself and due to the misunderstanding implied in the phrase, he unintentionally discloses another fact of importance: He promotes the marriage project of the Duke of Mantua. He has even introduced this duke into the court of Parma, secretly at first, and later by pretending that he was his own envoy and secretary²⁴. Duchess Flérída reacts to this unexpected confession with a reference to a saying that was familiar to contemporary Spaniards: «(¡Oh, cuántas veces / sacó verdad el que dijo / mentira!)»²⁵.

Whoever reads Calderón's plays carefully will find dozens of analogous scenes. Again and again, the playwright explores the same basic schemes of communication and in this regard there is little difference to be found between Phaeton's way of speaking in a mythological play and the Duchess of Parma's discursive strategies in a play of court intrigue. Characters engage in a subtle exchange of words loaded with double entendres and rich in the subtexts they convey. Talking aims at concealing one's own intentions, whereas listening—and equally important: observing the one who is speaking—is meant to gather clues regarding plans of allies, friends, false friends and hidden or overt adversaries. Consequently, these passages abound in metaphor, irony, euphemism, circumlocutions and ingenious conceits. Lies are forwarded without remorse, even «honesty» is employed to mislead, and frequently truthful facts are delivered in a way that entails misunderstanding. In short, both passages are about the strategic use of language and secrecy. Calderón, as we stated above, was the playwright that Pötting knew best and appreciated most. Commenting on the performance of *El secreto a voces*, the ambassador highlights the fact that the play deals with a «*duque de Mantua y la duquesa de Parma*». Now, the Gonzagas, Dukes of Mantua and the Farneses, Dukes of Parma, were anything but strangers to a diplomatic audience in Madrid. Far from that, they were related to the royal families of Madrid and Portugal, to the emperor in Vienna, and they were involved in Europe's most important political affairs. Pötting frequently records his meetings with people that belonged to the political sphere of these aristocratic households (I, 222).

23. The autograph copy of this play dates from 1642, cf. Cruickshank, *op. cit.*, p. 265-266; for an extensive introduction cf. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *El secreto a voces*, ed., introd. and notes Wolfram Aichinger, Simon Kroll, Fernando Rodríguez-Gallego, Kassel, Reichenberger, 2015.

24. Cf. Anthony J. Cascardi, «*El secreto a voces*: language and social illusion», in A. Cascardi, *The Limits of Illusion: A Critical Study of Calderón*, Cambridge / London, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 52-60.

25. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *El secreto a voces*, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

We do not pretend that comedies by Calderón provide any explicit commentary on current affairs. But it seems worthwhile to analyze its content under the light of the rhetoric of diplomacy and to take its explicit themes –love, jealousy, female honour, marriage– as ciphers that could stand for any urgent political issue. Put «secret negotiations with France» in the place of «secret love for Laura or Violante» and –*mutatis mutandis*– a good number of dialogues would perfectly fit into a context of political negotiation. The theatre could even be seen as a laboratory where rhetorical strategies for these occasions were designed, tried out or improved.

For his diplomatic correspondence, Pötting counted on the help of two secretaries, «*de cifra y lengua*»²⁶. El *secretario de la cifra* was in charge of the encryption and decoding of letters written in cipher²⁷. Cryptology had seen great advances since the Middle Ages; personalities of the importance of Francis Bacon (who was also skilled in diplomatic tasks) dedicated their genius to the elaboration of new methods for the encoding of messages²⁸. Calderón frequently refers to these techniques and was well informed about diplomatic secrecy and the secret transmission of written information²⁹. We will not further pursue this subject in its technical aspects on this occasion, but instead point to a mental capacity shared by the playwright, the cryptographer and the diplomat: they had to train their *imagination* in order to be able to work out how an apparent pattern –of characters on a piece of paper, of figures in a comedy of intrigue, of allies and antagonists on the chess board of court life– could be related to a hidden and more truthful one³⁰.

The old art of rhetoric brought to perfection by the Siglo de Oro playwrights was an important asset in the game of influence and power³¹. Whoever wanted to be trained in the fabrication of sharp sayings, even based on paradoxes and false syllogisms in order to provoke surprise and admiration could find rich inspiration in Calderón's work. The words, thoughts and frames of interpretation that male and female courtiers³² applied to organize experience were as much shaped by theatre as our own are by movies, television series or novels. Fiction, let's not underrate this fact, does not only reflect, distort,

26. Miguel Ángel Ochoa Brun, «Estudio preliminar», in M. Nieto Nuño (ed.), *Diario del conde de Pötting*, p. XXIII. Cf. also Manuel Gómez del Castillo, «El Espía Mayor y el Conductor de Embajadores», *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, t. 119, 1946, p. 317-339.

27. Cf. II, 160 n. 200.

28. Cf. William H. Sherman, «Cómo hacer que cualquier cosa signifique cualquier cosa», *Revista de Occidente*, n° 374-375, Julio-Agosto 2012: *El secreto*, p. 156-172.

29. Cf. Wolfram Aichinger, Simon Kroll (ed.), *Laute Geheimnisse. Calderón de la Barca und die Chiffren des Barock*, Wien, Turia + Kant, 2011.

30. Cf. Juan Carlos Galende Díaz, «Principios básicos de la criptología. El manuscrito 18657 de la Biblioteca Nacional. Basic Concepts of the Cryptology: The Manuscript of the Biblioteca Nacional», *Documenta & Instrumenta*, n° 4, 2006, p. 47-59.

31. Cf. Jesús María Usunáriz, *El lenguaje del embajador: secreto y disimulación en los tratados del Siglo de Oro español*, Ms., 2013.

32. Cf. Laura Oliván Santaliestra, *Amazonas del secreto en la embajada madrileña del Graf von Pötting (1663-1674)*, Ms., 2016.

exaggerate and dramatize life, it provides the frames, scripts and narratives that we live by³³.

In 1673, when his burdensome mission came to an end, Pötting made the following entry in his diary and we might attribute it more than just metaphorical value:

Visité al embajador de Holanda, y de allí me vine a palacio a ver la prueba y ensayo de una comedia que el rey mandó prevenir en el salón grande para los años de la reina su madre. El conde de Harrach y yo nos sentamos juntos; no me pareció ser cosa muy superior. La condesa estuvo en Palacio, y vio el mismo ensayo; hartas comedias y tragedias me he visto yo en este mal parado teatro de esa monarquía, adonde hay pocos buenos representantes y muchísimos disfraces del interés propio de cada uno, ni tampoco faltan diversas peligrosas tramoyas fabricadas sobre tantas pasiones que cada día se descubren; Dios por quien es lo remedie³⁴. (II, 401-402)

33. Cf. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 67-97; George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling, *Auf leisen Sohlen ins Gehirn: Politische Sprache und ihre heimliche Macht*, Heidelberg, Carl Auer, 2008; Fritz Peter Kirsch, «Les Thèses de Norbert Elias et l'histoire littéraire de la France», *littérature*, n° 84 décembre 1991, p. 96-108.

34. The metaphor of politics as a play can also be found in this note: «El embajador [de Francia] nos convidó a su casa para la representación de unos volatines y juegos de manos (que a buen seguro lo juega su rey con esta pobre monarquía harto bien), y después nos dio una merienda de dulces y todo género de bebidas» (II, 186).