

Mi vida/anda de un hilo pendiente

Precarity and Power in the Dramatic Works of Juan Pérez de Montalbán

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Mi vida / anda de un hilo pendiente:
Precarity and Power in the Dramatic
Works of Juan Pérez de Montalbán

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Le drame espagnol du Siècle d'Or aborde très fréquemment le thème de l'ascension et de la chute du *privado*, ou favori du roi: c'est le cas pour de nombreuses pièces de Juan Pérez de Montalbán. La présente étude se propose d'explorer la représentation de la précarité du favori dans l'œuvre du dramaturge, en portant une attention particulière aux *apariencias* emblématiques.

Mots-clés: Juan Pérez de Montalbán, précarité, *privanza*.

El drama español del Siglo de Oro cultivó con una frecuencia sorprendente el tema de la subida y caída del privado. Es un tema que aparece en muchas de las obras dramáticas de Juan Pérez de Montalbán. El análisis presente explora la representación de la precariedad del privado en la obra del dramaturgo con un enfoque especial en las *apariencias* dramáticas emblemáticas.

Palabras clave: Juan Pérez de Montalbán, precariedad, *privanza*.

Spanish drama of the Golden Age exploited with great frequency the theme of the rise and fall of the *privado*, or royal favourite. It is a theme that appears in many plays by Juan Pérez de Montalbán. This study explores the dramatist's depiction of the precariousness of the favourite, with a special focus on emblematic discovery scenes.

Keywords: Juan Pérez de Montalbán, precarity, *privanza*.

*P*recarity is a term that has been coopted by modern critics to emphasize economic uncertainties in the workplace and the attendant insecurities that ensue as a result of un- or under employment: «Precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely upon the past. [...] Life and work, and their dependence upon one another, are often imagined as increasingly precarious, their futures shadowed by pervasive terror as well as everyday anxieties about work» (Ridout and Schneider, 5)¹. In this study, however, I am interested in exploring a notion of the precarious in the dramatic works of Juan Pérez de Montalbán more along the lines of the definition provided in the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1737): «Precario. *adj.* que en lo forense se aplica a lo que solo se posee como en préstamo, y a voluntad de su dueño». Drama is, to a great extent, an exploration of the confrontation between individuals afflicted with human failings and precarious circumstances that test their mettle. In comedy, the individual triumphs over the problematic obstacles, while in tragedy the impediments prove to be too difficult to overcome. In Spanish drama of the Golden Age, tragic precarity, the sword of Damocles that dangles over the head of those who enjoy favor and power, is the theme of an extraordinary number of plays, and most particularly in those that deal with *privanza*².

Economic precarity is, however, applicable to Spanish Golden Age drama. Perhaps no profession, ancient or modern, has ever been more dependent on the fickle twists of fate as the theatrical industry, where the reputation and livelihood of so many interested *players* [emphasis added] hang delicately in the balance. Margaret R. Greer and Andrea Junguito remind us that in the Spanish Golden Age «the ‘blood’ that kept that theatrical heart pumping, nourishing it and the social organism it served, was money – the cash to buy scripts from playwrights, pay actors, buy costumes, and pay the theatre lease» (2004: 32). The success or failure of a theatrical troupe did not rest solely on its artistic talents nor the craft of the poets whose manuscripts provided the consumer goods that fed their business enterprise, but rather on the unpredictable tastes of the consumers, «a double public, those members of the public who voted with their feet, voices, whistles, and sometimes more solid projectiles; and an aristocratic elite that exercised its control through the Council of Castile and the municipal councils, the *cofradías*, and other forms of institutional or personal patronage» (Greer and Junguito 2004: 36-37).

We need look no further than Quevedo’s *Buscón* (1626) for evidence of the precarity of the existence of Golden Age *representantes*. Pablos joins the ranks

1. *The Drama Review* 56.4 (2012) dedicates an entire special issue to the topic of precarity and performance.

2. Many studies have been dedicated to the theme of *privanza* in Spanish Golden Age drama. For Calderón de la Barca, see Sáez (2015); for Lope de Vega, see Carreño-Rodríguez (2005), Peale (2004), Ferrer Vals (2004) and Atienza (2009); for Tirso de Molina, see Weimer (1998); for Mira de Amescua, see Wise (2014) and Oriel (1996); for Ruiz de Alarcón, see Campell (2016); for Quevedo’s play *Cómo ha de ser el privado*, see De Armas (2004) and Hernández Araico (2000); for more general studies, see Profeti (2010) and Bradner (1971); for monographic volumes that include studies on *privanza* in Golden Age drama, see the collections edited by Mallorquí-Rucalleda (2015) and Usunáriz and Williamson (2013).

of an itinerant company and rises through its hierarchy. He experiences all the highs and lows of the theatrical profession. The protagonist describes the consequences of appearing in a disastrous comedy that was fashioned from pilfered bits and pieces of the works of other playwrights:

quiso Dios que empezaba por una guerra, y salía yo armado y con rodela, que, si no, a manos de mal membrillo, tronchos y badeas, acabo. No se ha visto tal torbellino, y ello merecía la comedia, porque traía un rey de Normandía sin propósito, en hábito de ermitaño, y metía dos lacayos por hacer reír, y al desatar de la maraña no había más de casarse todos y allá vas. Al fin, tuvimos nuestro merecido (ed. Ynduráin, 260).

But Pablos also achieves great success and wealth during his brief theatrical career, only to have it all come crashing down around him when the company disbands after the arrest of its *autor*: «*Sucedió, pues, que a mi autor (que siempre paran en esto), sabiendo que en Toledo le había ido bien, le ejecutaron no sé por qué deudas y le pusieron en la cárcel, con lo cual nos desmembramos todos y echó cada uno por su parte*» (ed. Ynduráin, 265-266).

The precarious situation of the *privado* is a constant in Spanish Golden Age *comedia*, and this popular theme is also present in the plays of Juan Pérez de Montalbán. Even though he lamented in his dedication of *La doncella de labor* that: «*oy está la Comedia tan política, que viene a ser como vn sermón en consonantes*» (*Primero tomo de las comedias...*, f. 88v), Lope's friend and disciple exploited the discourse of political power and authority extensively in his dramatic production, especially in those plays with a historical or pseudo-historical protagonist whose rise and fall would have been familiar to the majority of the heterogeneous theater-going public, endlessly fascinated by the constant turning of the wheel of fortune.

In *Los templarios*, Pérez de Montalbán chronicled a collective case of the rise and fall from power. The Templar Order, founded in the Middle Ages to protect Christians on religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem, amassed extraordinary power and wealth over the course of the two centuries of its existence. Jacques de Molay (Jacobo de la Mota in the play), the Grand Master of the Knights Templar and reformer of the Order at the time that Pope Clement V ordered its dissolution, was arrested, tortured and burned at the stake in Paris in 1314.

In our dramatist's rendition of the exemplary tale of the consequences of the abuse of power, Germano is the protagonist whose individual fate as *caudillo de los Templarios* embodies the plight of the Order as a whole. When the reform-minded Grand Master informs the Templars that the Pope has issued a new rule, «*Que hagan voto de pureza*» (74r), the downward spiral of the once virtuous protagonist is set in motion because, as the *gracioso* Gilote explains: «*que no ay castidad segura / en santos que comen bien*» (f. 75r). When Jacobo learns that his two captains, Albante and Germán are cohabiting with Flora and Casandra, he orders that they be stripped of their swords and habits and imprisoned.

Lust, however, is not the sole reason given for the fall of the Templars. Gilote, fulfilling the *gracioso's* role as the conveyor of truth, imputes the corruption of the Templar Order to the evils of wealth:

*quando los Templarios eran,
Menga hermana, menos ricos,
y andauan assegurando
el passo a los peregrinos
por los montes, y las peñas,
eran buenos, yo lo fio;
pero agora que endiosados
están con el infinito
número de oro que tienen,
y dexando su exercicio
se han metido en los Palacios
de los Reyes con officios,
y son tan dueños de todo,
que quien no tiene vn padrino
Templario, no alcança nada,
aunque lo haya merecido. (f. 79v)*

In the final act of the play the king and Pope issue the order for the execution of all the Templars and the prohibition of their Order. Jacobo counsels prudence, advising the Pope to punish only those Templars who are corrupt: «*Para hazer bien vuestro oficio, / porque estándome juzgando / de Dios estáis imitando / el poder, y el exercicio*» (f. 83r). Pope Clement, however, invokes the doctrine of Reason of State, although the term is not explicitly enunciated: «*Que mueran malos y buenos / para que los malos mueran, / y así estará Dios vengado*» (f. 83v). What is more, he compares the danger that the Templars represent to the Faith as a cancer that must be extirpated:

*Yo confieso que parece
duro el medio que se escoge,
¿pero cuándo el cáncer, cuándo
(que todo vn cuerpo corrompe)
tuuo remedios más blandos,
ni curas menos atrozes? (f. 86v)*

He concludes that the Templars must be totally eradicated, for: «*La Iglesia no admite dudas, / la virtud no aprueua errores, / la Fé no consiente achaques*» (f. 86v).

The spectator of *Los templarios* experiences a true and conflictive catharsis. Inherent in the drama's subtext is a warning to the agents of authority to be wary of absuing their powers. However, the injustice of the fate suffered by the innocent Grand Master and the majority of the members of the Order is reflected in a visually symbolic discovery scene that effectively closes the play and leaves the audience to ponder the nature of justice and the consequences of unchecked power and wealth: «*Tocan tristemente, y descubren unos corredores donde están los Templarios, dados garrote, con diferentes castigos, y con sus mantos, y en medio Jacobo de Mola agonizando*» (f. 87r). This is a visually emblematic depiction of the precarious nature of secular power.

Shakespeare's Henry IV uttered the famous lament: «Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown» (*Henry IV*, Part 2, Act 3, Scene 1). One of the main

impediments to the respite of a monarch is the impossibility of knowing the truth of what is happening in his kingdom and what people really think of him. This is what motivated certain kings to disguise themselves and visit their realms at night, and what led many to place all their trust in that one confidant who might reveal unpleasant truths without fear of reprisals or repercussions: the *privado*, or favourite. In *El hijo del serafín, San Pedro de Alcántara*, the protagonist explains the fear that subjects have of sharing the truth with their monarch to King Don Sebastián:

Rey: ¿Y mis privados, y amigos?
 Pedro: Los amigos por testigos
 no valen aquí.
 Rey: ¿Por qué?
 Pedro: Porque nadie al descubierto
 quiere dezir vn pesar
 a quien pretende agradar.
 [...]
 Rey: ¿Luego ay en el mundo quien
 con engaños me hable a mí?
 Pedro: Estoy por dezir que sí,
 porque si lo mira bien
 verá vuestra Magestad
 que es en las humanas leyes
 plaga antigua de los Reyes
 el no tratarles verdad.
 Rey: Y qué es la razón?
 Pedro: Auer
 castigo para el malsín,
 para el loco, para el ruin,
 para el de mal proceder,
 para el ladrón, para el malo,
 y en fin por qualquier camino
 para cada desatino
 cárcel, horca, afrenta, o palo,
 y no auer pena, señor,
 para los que lisonjean,
 y la verdad regatean,
 por conseruar el fauor. (*El hijo del serafín, San Pedro de
 Alcántara*, f. 34r-v)

Pérez de Montalbán, like many of his fellow dramatists, explored the curious relationship between princes and their seemingly untouchable and irreproachable *privados* in a number of plays. Spanish Golden Age spectators seemed to relish the role of vicarious observers of the rise and fall of these envied and often despised intimates of monarchs.

Open discussion of the foibles of a monarch was of course risky business, and thus plays dealing with the human failings of rulers were usually set in foreign countries or the very distant past. One such example in the dramatic repertoire of Pérez de Montalbán is *El Mariscal de Virón*³. As a high ranking

3. Parker, based on the attack of Pérez de Montalbán's *Para todos* penned by Quevedo in

minister of military justice⁴, it is not wholly inconceivable that a *mariscal* might have enjoyed the confidence of the king, and thus in his dedication of the play, Pérez de Montalbán refers to the Mariscal as: «*aquel Valido, el más agasajado de su Rey, y el más valiente restaurador de su Patria, si bien malogró lo vno, y lo otro con la ambición de pensar que quien nace vassallo por naturaleza, puede llegar a Príncipe por maña*» (*El Mariscal de Virón*, f. 110v).

In this play the soldier Carlos de Virón, in the service of the French King, slowly climbs the ladder of the hierarchy at court with his martial victories, adding the titles of *Duque de Virón* and *Par de Francia*. But his insatiable ambition for further honors leads him to enter into a conspiracy with other traitors to overthrow the monarch. When the plot is discovered, an unrepentant Carlos refuses to reveal the identity of his co-conspirators and is sentenced to death. The arrogant Carlos is certain that the sentence will not be carried out, for the king needs him to help preserve his hold on governance against his enemies. The pathos of the play results from the slow realization that comes over the protagonist that the lofty position he has attained will not prevent an ignominious and dishonorable public execution.

The French king tries to warn Carlos that he can fall out of favor just as quickly as he rose to power: «*que el Rey se puede enojar, / y enojado hazer vaxar / al mismo que hizo subir*» (f. 116v). Likewise, the Conde Suisón tries to disillusion the vainglorious Carlos: «*Sombras son de la fortuna / la priuança y la caída*» (f. 124v). Carlos, however, does not heed the advice, and in his death, as related by Blanca, he is an exemplary warning to others of the precarity of being a favourite. His scrupulously staged execution unfolded «*al espectáculo grande / del mayor teatro, en cuya / tragedia representaua / sus mudanças la fortuna*» (f. 129r). There, before the unpardoning gaze of a massive public, the *Mariscal* symbolizes the: «*[...] lástima y exemplo / de las priuanças, que duran / lo que la vida en la rosa, / lo que en la flor la hermosura*» (f. 129r). And although Pérez de Montalbán may have missed a bet by not actually staging this execution as a discovery scene, the spectacle is nevertheless described as a vivid hieroglyph of the night and death:

*Llegó el Duque a vn cadabalso
trono infame de sus culpas,
cuya máquina sublime
negros ropages enlutan.
Era el fúnebre aparato*

his *La Perinola* (1633), points out that the play is based on the historical account of the events found in Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo's *Vida del duque de Virón* published in 1629 (1975: 45). A satirical burlesque version of Pérez de Montalbán's play with the same title was published by Juan de Maldonado in 1658. For an analysis of this humorous *refundición*, see Hurtado and Mata Induráin.

4. The definition of *mariscal* in the 1734 edition of the *Diccionario de Autoridades* reads in part: «*Oficial mui preeminente y principal en la Milicia, inferior solamente al Condestable. Era Juez de todo el Exército, y le tocaba, no solo castigar los delitos, sino también el gobierno económico, disponiendo los alojamientos, previniendo los abastos, y corrigiendo las medidas, y otras cosas semejantes.*»

*geroglífico, o figura
de la noche, y de la muerte,
tan espeso en cada vna
por el color, y la forma,
que sin que allí se confundan
dos imágenes a vn tiempo
parece nublado, y vrna,
por qualquiera parte noche,
por qualquiera parte tumba.* (f. 129r)

It is indeed as an emblematic figure that the *privado* comes to embody the collective fears and aspirations of the playgoing public. The *corral de comedias* was an arena where it was possible to dream with aspirations of transcending the rigid boundaries of class distinction through the vicarious experience of dramatic representation, but the tragic fate of those who aimed beyond their God-given state in life was at the same time a stark and often visually reinforced reminder of the dangers inherent in those who, like Carlos, are driven «*a que aspire, a que me atreua / al Sol*» (f. 111v)⁵. Nonetheless, the negative attributes of treachery, arrogance and excessive ambition would have left the audience satisfied that Carlos received his just desserts.

The life of Felipe II provided the dramatic material for a trilogy of plays by our dramatist⁶. Parker indicates that *El segundo Séneca de España* (*Para todos*, 1632) covers the period 1569-1570; *El señor don Juan de Austria en Madrid* (*Primero Tomo de las Comedias del Doctor Ivan Pérez de Montalbán*, 1635) deals with the years 1571-1576) and the *Segunda parte del Séneca de España, Don Felipe Segundo* (*Segundo tomo de las comedias del Doctor Ivan Pérez de Montalbán*, 1638) covers the years 1588-1598 (1975: 56). It is the play dedicated to Felipe's half-brother that touches most directly on the theme of *privanza*. The character who enjoys the king's favor in this comedy is Diego de Córdoba. In his subtle attempts to get the monarch to reward him for his services, Diego alludes to his situation through analogies with some of his neighbors. One of them is a philosopher who: «*Es vn hombre muy preciado / de estar de ti retirado, / y de no saberte el nombre: / hase dado en lastimar / de mí, viéndome valer*» (f. 222v). The king responds with a barely veiled threat: «*Querrá dezir, que el caer / es lo mismo que el priuar*» (f. 222v). Diego however persists with his anecdote, telling the king that the philosopher, upon seeing a stone-layer at work on the pavement, proclaimed: «*Solo aqueste sin rezelo / priuando en el mundo está, / pues del suelo aun no caerá, / porque está pegado al suelo*» (f. 222v). And once again Felipe responds in a menacingly enigmatic fashion, assuring Diego that the vogue in Madrid for adding subterranean *cuevas* to houses threatens even the *empedrador* who trusts that he is standing on firm ground:

5. For emblematic associations of monarchs depicted with solar imagery, see Mínguez (2001). For a more thorough consideration of emblematics in the plays of Pérez de Montalbán, see Cull, «*A mí no hable en emblemas*» (at press).

6. For a study of the figure of Felipe II in the plays of Pérez de Montalbán, and his depiction as a symbol of political prudence and generosity, see Voinier (2010).

*y entonces el oficial
está más cerca de hundirse;
y así según este caso,
aunque sea empedrador,
nadie puede sin temor,
dar en la fortuna vn passo:
porque no puede saber
la desdicha que le espera,
y el más humilde en su esfera
tiene de donde caer. (f. 222v)*

El señor don Juan de Austria en Madrid is a comedy, however, and thus the theme of *privanza* is secondary, with a greater emphasis placed on the image of the king as someone whose mere presence is sufficient to inspire fear, awe and respect. Indeed, the gravitas of Felipe II, and of monarchs in general, should be adequate to keep in check the excesses of the *valido*, as Santoyo observes in the first play from the trilogy, *El segundo Séneca de España*:

*Visto da respeto, y miedo,
mas hablado, no ay valor
a quien no turbe: confesso,
que tiemblo delante dél,
y aun solo en nombrarle tiemblo.
[...]
que las palabras de vn Rey
enojado, y circunspecto
son como valas de plomo
recién heridas del fuego,
que matan sin calentura,
con el ayre que las dieron. (f. 14r)*

The *Segunda parte del Séneca de España*, *Don Felipe Segundo* begins, rather atypically, with a series of discovery scenes in which Felipe II reveals to prince Fernando emblematic representations of the humility with which he should embrace the duties of kingship: the portraits, coffins and tombs of his ancestors⁷. In a kind of emblematic *subscriptio* of the meaning of the visually symbolic tableaux displayed, King Philip himself observes: «y también que le sirua / en tanta pompa de freno. / Ver que estos mármores blancos / aunque de polbos cubiertos / vn tiempo lo fueron todo, / y ya no son lo que fueron» (f. 23v). The play concludes with the monarch's exemplary death, and when Felipe III orders Cristóbal de Mora to surrender his key to the king's *retrete* to the Marqués de Denia, the former laments his fall from power:

*Infeliz principio
he tenido con su Alteza.
oy mi priuança ha caído,
porque roto el fundamento,*

7. On the emblematic nature of many discovery scenes in Spanish Golden Age plays, see Cull (1996).

*el más seguro edificio
titubea hasta mouer
su altiuez con el auismo,
muere el Rey, y muero yo. (f. 40v).*

The new monarch begins his reign with the sobering realization that kingship is a painful burden: «*y es vn linaje de pena / que casi toca en martirio*» (f. 40v).

Another rise and fall of an overly ambitious favourite is dramatized in the historical play *Amor, privanza, y castigo* (also known as *El fin más desgraciado y fortunas de Seyano*)⁸. Lucius Aelius Seianus, born into the equestrian caste, exploited his friendship with Emperor Tiberius to rise to the position of Roman counsel by savagely eliminating his political enemies. But just when it seemed as though he was the most powerful man in the empire, he was denounced, arrested and executed. Pérez de Montalbán's rendition is faithful to the historical account, and in the dedication he writes: «*Es el assumpto, Elio Seyano, el mayor valido que tuuo Tiberio, y el enemigo más atroz de su vida, quizá porque le amaua tanto, que el mucho fauor, no solo haze ingratos, sino traidores*» (f. 152r). Although the play does not discuss the nature of *privanza* directly, it comments subtly on the precarity of corrupt favorites. Sejanus himself, when his fall is imminent, ponders the significance of certain ill omens he has noticed, such as lightning:

*los rayos no han de temerse
y quando rayos baxaran
¿era obligación precisa
auer de topar conmigo?
aunque sí, fácil sería
que las más vezes vn rayo
a lo más alto se inclina,
las torres suele buscar,
y en el campo dan sus iras
sobre el árbol de más bríos,
que suele para desdichas
dar el cielo la fortuna,
alto estoy temer podía,
rayo es vn Rey ofendido. (f. 171v)*

It is possible that Pérez de Montalbán is evoking here one of Juan de Borja's *Empresas morales* (Prague, 1581). The emblematic *pictura* depicts lightning bolts toppling a tower. The motto, *Celsa gravioere casu decidunt* (*Que las cosas altas dan mayores caídas*), is taken from Horace's *Carminum* 2.10.10. The prose commentary links the visual image and motto to the context of those whose ambitions are too lofty:

Cosa es muy ordinaria a todos los hombres del mundo trabajar, y desvelarse, por subir, y llegar al más alto, y encumbrado estado, a que su desseo les lleva, y guía, [...] y ya que alguno

8. Profeti comments that in this play Pérez de Montalbán: «*si discetta con espressioni non dissimili dai coevi dramaturghi sul perfetto privado*» (1970: 84).

aya subido a esa cumbre, fácilmente es de allí derribado, por ser mayores los peligros, quanto el estado es más alto [...] Lo más seguro y mejor sería, contentarse cada uno con el estado, en que nació [...] y con esto se viviría con más quietud, y contento (Primera parte, 190-91).

The play ends with an equally emblematic discovery scene of the bloody cadavers of Seyano and Libia, justly punished: *Descúbrese Seyano, sangriento, y Libia como despeñados*. (f. 173v)

Other plays of uncertain attribution deal with the theme of *privanza*, but since they are comedies, we do not see the tragic rise and fall of the *valido*. *Ser prudente y ser sufrido* appeared in the first volume of the *Comedias escogidas del Doctor don Juan Pérez de Montalván* (Madrid 1837). Not all critics agree on its attribution to our dramatist. It is a play, however, that is consistent with the views on *privanza* expressed by the protégé of Lope de Vega in the works universally recognized as authentic. In this play Bermudo is a trusted minister of king Alfonso de León. The monarch asks him to always tell him the truth: «*que a la Real Magestad, nunca llega la verdad, con el rostro descubierto*» (*Comedias escogidas* I, 399). One of the truths that he confides is the popular rumblings over the king's choice of a *privado*:

*Y en todos la más corriente
plática ahora, es, señor,
de tu privanza, y favor;
que está la ciudad pendiente
de tu elección, divididos
los pareceres, supuesto
que juzgan todos en esto
de sus pasiones movidos.* (*Comedias escogidas* I, 401).

This provokes a theoretical discussion between the two men about whether or not a king should in fact have a favourite. Bermudo launches into a long discourse, beginning with Adam, who received Eve as his counselor; Christ chose San Juan as his *privado*. All kings since, according to Bermudo, have had favourites. The only difference is the amount of power they have enjoyed. He posits that it is natural to want to have a friend with whom to share secrets, since the human condition is to be an *animal sociable* (*Comedias escogidas* I, 402), and adds that just as the sun does not share its rays directly, the king needs a mediator to communicate with his subjects, since they are opposite extremes of a spectrum (*Comedias escogidas* I, 403). The king is thus persuaded by these arguments, although he understands the burden that the job represents to the chosen one:

*que el privar, si se ha de usar
con justicia, y sin exceso,
es carga, es trabajo, es peso.
que no se ha de desear.* (*Comedias escogidas* I, 404, mispaginated as 304)

The anxiety occasioned by the king's selection of a *privado* is an aspect stressed in this play. The choice has consequences not only for those at court

who compete for royal favor, but also for the populace as a whole, as Bermudo explains:

*Y en todos la más corriente
plática ahora, es, señor,
de tu privanza, y favor;
que está la ciudad pendiente
de tu elección, divididos
los pareceres, supuesto
que juzgas todos en esto
de sus pasiones movidos.* (Comedias escogidas I, 401)

The real emphasis in this play is not on the *privado*, but rather on the selection process. Once again, assuming that it was indeed Pérez de Montalbán who authored it, an emblematic depiction displayed before the eyes of the beholders is crucial in revealing the king's prudence and discretion. This key moment occurs in a discovery that reveals a portrait of the king, which he hides behind in order to listen to the conversation between various pretenders for the position of *privado*. Diego Núñez notices that the portrait includes an inscription, the equivalent of an emblematic epigram, or *inscriptio*. It reads: «*Cordero soy justiciero, / y pacífico león*» (Comedias escogidas I, 424). In order to achieve the goal of the equitable administration of justice entailed in the enigmatic epigram and make the correct choice of a *privado*, the monarch needs to learn to conquer his own human needs and desires for the good of the kingdom, by suppressing his amorous passions:

*he de probar, vive Dios,
a ser sufrido, a ser Rey,
y he de mostrar, que pues yo
sé gobernar y vencerme,
que es la victoria mayor,
sabré vencer mis contrarios, y
gobernar a León.* (Comedias escogidas I, 440)

Because we are dealing with comedy rather than a tragedy, he is successful at controlling himself, and the play ends with marriages.

Another play commonly attributed to Pérez de Montalbán, published partially in the second volume of *Comedias escogidas*, and fully as a *suelta*, is *Como a padre y como a rey*⁹. Conrado, the *privado* of the king of Sicily, wants to pass the mantle down to Carlos, who he has raised as his son. Carlos accepts the role as favourite only grudgingly, aware that he will be disliked merely for being the king's confidant:

*porque aunque sepan que yo
cuerto, y ajustado vivo,
seré malo porque privo,*

9. Cañas Murillo deals briefly with this play as one which develops a series of ideas «*sobre el ejercicio del poder, se va a ofrecer un doctrinal de privados, un conjunto de consejos para el buen gobierno de un país*» (2006: 106).

*y bueno el que ayer privó.
Y si el mundo nunca ha visto,
ni el tiempo nos lo ha enseñado,
haberse otra vez juntado
ser privado y ser bien quisto,
no es mucho que el alma tuerza
de su gusto al parabién,
pues aun procediendo bien,
he de ser malo por fuerza.* (Comedias escogidas II, 14)

The monarch, however, persuades him that even a king must have a friend with whom to share his passions, and then offers advice on how to perform his duties well:

*y así, procura advertido,
si no te quieres perder,
que halle el noble que seguir
en ti, el vulgo que admirar,
la envidia que murmurar,
y ninguno que advertir.
Repara en qualquier acción,
que antes tu conciencia es,
luego mi gusto, y después
la vulgar satisfacción.*¹⁰

Before the king reveals Carlos's true identity to his son, the monarch puts him to the test in his role as *privado*. The king is particularly delighted to find out how Carlos deals with court pretenders, observing his decisions in hiding *al paño*:

*dando está audiencia, ésta es
la prueba más principal
de un político caudal;
pues ya grave, ya cortés,
ya enojado, ya prudente,
ya apacible, ya severo,
ya blando, ya justiciero,
ya cruel, y ya clemente,
yendo por diversos modos,
uno solo al parecer,
muchos hombres ha de ser
para contentar a todos.* (suelta, 11)

Another play published only in a *suelta* and attributed to Pérez de Montalbán is *La ventura en el engaño*¹¹. Here a former favourite of King Juan III of Portugal, Don Juan de Alencastro, has retired to a quiet life in the countryside,

10. The text in the *Comedias escogidas* edition is corrupt, substituting text from another play (*El yerro del entendido* by Juan de Matos Fragoso, whose first volume of *Comedias escogidas* was also published by Ortega in 1828) for the text by Pérez de Montalbán. This quote is cited from the *suelta* edition, available at the *Cervantes Virtual* website, page 2.

11. Parker does not deal with this play at all, but Bacon concurs with La Barrera and Schack that «Montalbán gas a strong claim to authorship» (1912: 450).

disillusioned with the pretense of court and the dearth of compensation for all the services that he has rendered: «*que quantos gustos se ofrecen / en la Corte y glorias falsas, / que las privanças del mundo / son imagen de inconstancia*» (Act 1, unpaginated). In the context of a party game where the disguised king is playing the role of «king», Alencastro is allowed to air his grievances without fear of retribution:

*y así es justo que te advierta
cosas de razón de estado,
que alcancé con la experiencia.
No se puede llamar Rey
el que en las almas no reyna,
el que la virtud castiga,
y el que la lisonja premia.* (Act 2, unpaginated)

King John takes to heart the advice and reaffirms the prudence of a monarch disguising himself on occasion to find out the truth of what his subjects think of him: «*O quanto importa a los Reyes; / que con disfraz se entretengan, / por las Ciudades mirando / los que con razón se quexan*» (Act 2, unpaginated).

Another play most likely penned by Pérez de Montalbán¹² that deals with the theme of *privanza* is *El valor perseguido y la traición vengada*. Here the perfidious Conde Arnesto is the favourite of the King of Naples. He concocts a scheme to rob the *infanta* Matilde of her honor by pretending to be another. He later attempts to violate Octavia, daughter of the Duque de Ferrara. In trying to cover up his misdeeds and keep the king from discovering his treachery, Arnesto utters the proverb that symbolizes the precarity of his position: «*Mi vida / anda de un hilo pendiente*» (15)¹³. And in the end he does indeed pay the consequences for his treachery.

What is unique in this play is that the *gracioso* Martín, the servant of Arnesto, assumes the role of the favourite of his master, thus presenting the perils of *privanza* in a satirical vein. He tells his fellow *gracioso* Durón that he should no longer address him «*Tú por tú con Don Martín / el privado del privado*» (15). What is more, he counsels:

*Y si queréis negociar
qualquier cosa de importancia,
habladme con memorial,
que soy hombre principal,
desterrad vuestra ignorancia.
Quedad con esto instruido
del modo que veis de hablar
a quien tiene tal lugar,
y está tan favorecido*

12. See Bacon (1912: 450) and Parker (1975: 65-66).

13. Correas registers this version of the proverb: «*Colgado de un hilo. (Estar en peligro; lo que colgado de los cabellos).*» A variant is found in another play attributed to Pérez de Montalbán: «*El alma tengo en un hilo*» (*Comedias escogidas II, Como a padre y como a rey*, 14, Cervantes Virtual edition).

*como yo, necio indiscreto,
inhábil tontorrontón,
Don Martín soy, muy Don,
y Don de mucho respeto. (15)*

As the typically arrogant Spaniard (at least in the eyes of his Italian hosts), Durón learns a lesson of humility from the pompous behavior of Martín:

*Juzgávame en alto estado
como mi señor privava,
mas el tiempo me engañava,
pues que me dexó burlado.
Ya me llamé Don Durón,
y muy grave vez alguna,
pero quedéme a la luna,
sin la renta, y sin el Don. (15)*

Other plays attributed to or written by Pérez de Montalbán deal with the rise and fall from grace of a protagonist who would have been known to the spectators, but space limitations preclude their thorough consideration here. Some of these include *El valiente Nazareno* (also known as *El divino nazareno Sansón / Los hijos de la fortuna*, included in the *Segundo tomo*), *La lindona de Galicia* and the two part play, *La puerta Macarena*. There are also plays where the trajectory is reversed and a protagonist of humble origins or loose morals rises to fame and honor, such as *Don Florisel de Niquea (Segundo tomo)*, *Teágenes y Clariquea (Segundo tomo)*, *Palmerín de Oliva*, *La gitana de Ménfis*, *Santa María Egipcíaca* and *La mudanza en el amor*.

In a theocentric world obsessed with justice, both secular and divine, the individual who enjoyed the confidence of the monarch was under constant scrutiny by those who feared that he might abuse his authority. Proximity to power brought great rewards and great peril, as Rodrigo observes in *La puerta Macarena. Primera parte*:

*Otro dixo, que era el Rey
como el fuego, y no decía
mal, que de lexos calienta,
y de cerca abrasa. (20)*

Juan Pérez de Montalbán's treatment of the precarious nature of the politics of power and authority, in conclusion, is most original and effective in those plays where the message is conveyed both visually and through the dialogue in an emblematic discovery.

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