

Staging the State in Calderón's *Argenis y Poliarco*

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Abstract

Calderón adapted Barclay's best-selling political romance *Argenis* (Paris, 1621) with the title *Argenis y Poliarco* sometime between 1626 and 1636, the date of its first recorded performance. It was first printed in 1637, in the *Segunda Parte* of his plays. In comparison with other works from that collection, such as *El médico de su honra* or the two *comedias palaciegas*, *El mayor encanto amor* and *El galán fantasma*, *Argenis y Poliarco* is virtually unknown, with only a few critical studies and one recent edition by Alicia Vara López (2015). This edition, coupled with the renewed interest in Barclay's neo-Latin romance, should inspire critical reconsideration of a play that appeared in a transformative moment in Calderón's career.

After reviewing the scholarship on how Calderón transformed the romance into his distinctive theatrical idiom, I investigate the play's political meaning and challenge the view that *Argenis y Poliarco* is above all a palatine play about love. While it is true that Calderón simplifies the plot, by eliminating or pushing offstage the overtly political action and by cutting Barclay's disquisitions on good government, I argue that the political element is not suppressed. It is, rather, recast in theatrical terms. Calderón's skillful stagecraft constitutes a dramatic representation of a European political order marked by ambiguity, plurality and contingency, where the destiny of a state is determined in large measure by what happens beyond its borders.

Keywords

Pedro Calderón de la Barca; John Barclay; staging; political theatre

Resumen

El Estado en escena en Argenis y Poliarco de Calderón

Calderón adaptó la novela *Argenis* de John Barclay (Paris 1621) con el título *Argenis y Poliarco* entre 1626 y 1636, la fecha de su primera actuación documentada. Se publicó por

primera vez en 1637, en la *Segunda parte* de sus obras dramáticas. En comparación con otras obras de dicha colección, como *El médico de su honra* o las dos comedias palaciegas, *El mayor encanto amor* y *El galán fantasma*, *Argenis y Poliarco* es una comedia casi desconocida, y cuenta con muy pocos estudios críticos y una edición reciente a cargo de Alicia Vara López (2015). Esta edición, junto al interés renovado en la novela neo-latina de Barclay, debería inspirar una reconsideración de una comedia que es fruto de un periodo transformativo de la carrera literaria de Calderón.

Tras reseñar la crítica sobre la ‘Calderonización’ de la novela y su adaptación a los patrones de la comedia española, investigo su significado político, poniendo en tela de juicio la interpretación de *Argenis y Poliarco* como una comedia palatina cuyo tema principal es puramente amoroso. Si bien es cierto que Calderón corta las disquisiciones sobre el buen gobierno, y relega fuera del escenario la acción explícitamente política, no suprime por completo el elemento político. Sostengo que los recursos escenográficos del dramaturgo le permiten representar un mundo político europeo caracterizado por la ambigüedad, la pluralidad y la contingencia, donde el destino de un estado es determinado en gran medida por lo que ocurre fuera de sus fronteras.

Palabras clave

Pedro Calderón de la Barca; John Barclay; escenografía; teatro político

Picturing himself before the tomb of John Barclay, José Pellicer, author of one of two Spanish translations of *Argenis* that appeared within months of each other in 1626, pays grandiloquent tribute to the funerary urn of the recently deceased Scottish writer:

Salve urna eloqüente, que aun respiras vapores de frases animadas, y por tus resquicios elados renace la política viviente [...]. Pues, *Argenis*, *Argenis* digo, aquella hermosa enigma, aquel símbolo animado, aquella metáfora que introduces con alma de tu intento, censo es glorioso que impones sobre la posteridad para que ya en renombres o embidias te restituyan réditos los siglos. (Barclay 1626: f. *5v)

Pellicer’s phrasing —“frases animadas”, “política viviente”, “símbolo animado”, “censo glorioso”— conveys the vitality and currency of Barclay’s best-

selling neo-Latin romance throughout seventeenth-century Europe. A few pages before, at the start of his dedicatory epistle to the Genoese nobleman don Antonio de Negro, he had described the passions aroused by this work in more explicit, albeit more prosaic, terms: “*Argenis*, aquella cizaña erudita, que ha puesto en pleito los ingenios más soberanos del siglo, y en contingencia la opinión de todos” (f. *3r). The moral significance and political targets of this “hermosa enigma” were, as Pellicer acknowledges, subject to dispute. Everybody’s opinion has been placed “en contingencia”, transformed into what the *Diccionario de autoridades* (1726) would later define as a “caso que puede ser o no ser, según las circunstancias y estado en que se halla alguna cosa” (s.v.).

The interpretative contingency of Barclay’s romance also poses, quite naturally, a challenge to Pellicer himself. However, he is not interested in entering this “cizaña erudita” in order to speculate on the identities of the European statesmen allegedly veiled by the romance’s political allegory, preferring instead to engage with the work’s broader political implications. Moreover, in swerving away from historical specificity, he focusses on another aspect of this “beautiful enigma”. For him, as translator, the challenge of *Argenis* lies in unravelling its literal meaning and verbal texture:

Yo pues osé descifrarte. Si lo he conseguido revélemelo tu monumento o estre-meciéndose sus piedras o inspirando en mí, ya despierto, ya en sueños, alguna señal tus manes. Yo intenté rebolver tu máquina latina, cuyos laberintos (o Dédalo estadista) bueltos del idioma romano al español language, aun temo te parezcan delitos. (*6r-v)

In an attempt to assume a share of the original’s enigmatic aura, he poses a question of his own: has he successfully deciphered its syntactic artifice and reproduced the labyrinthine convolutions of its plot? The conundrum can be answered only by some authorial signal sent from beyond the grave.

For all its rhetorical posturing, Pellicer’s exordial conceit is alluring. It draws our attention to *Argenis* as a literary monument, constructed by a highly inventive political craftsman (“Dédalo estadista”), who in death possesses the ghostly power to speak and inspire. As a “censo glorioso”, *Argenis* “taxes” our intellect and our payment (“réditos”) comes in the form of praise and creative emulation. However enigmatically, *Argenis* speaks to us but as it does so it demands something in return. Pellicer’s tribute is his translation, of course, and although he sidesteps debates over precise historical references, he accompanies it with a general interpretation of his own: “Aquí verá v.m. reprehendidos los vicios, no las personas, pues para que quedassen ocultas las recató entre anagramas”. The *vicios*, he explains, are the effects of desire and amorous passion upon the state: “Amores tan puros, que solo les quita el crédito aver sucedido en poderosos, por la mayor parte siempre arrojados [en] guerras sangrientas”. Desire also threatens the sacred bonds and obligations of friendship: “Amistades desenquädernadas por pasiones propias [...] pues son tan poderosos los deseos [...] que atropellan

por las obligaciones de modo que no parezca amistad la primera”. As if to counterbalance the narrative emphasis on the destructive and transformative effects of desire, Pellicer reassures readers that they will also find wise disquisitions on the affairs of state: “Las materias de estado [son] ventiladas cuerdamente, y todo con tanta eloqüencia que ganó jurisdicción sobre quantos sabios tuvieron los tres tiempos” (ff. *3r-v).

Running throughout Pellicer’s prefatory statements is an implicit awareness of the interrelationship between theme, form, and reader response. He links love and government, and connects these themes to Barclay’s veiled and vital eloquence (“símbolo animado”, “hermosa enigma”, “metáfora [...] con alma”). His skillful rhetoric brings *Argenis* to life and, in the process, animates readers themselves, forcing them to respond critically and creatively and to reflect upon the contingency and limitations of their own readings. Figurative language and the joint affairs of heart and state combine in Pellicer’s summary of the general significance of Barclay’s work:

Ya en la Academia de amor posee cátedra la razón de estado. Ya entre lo tierno de los requiebros halla cabida lo político. Ya en las consultas de Cupido da su voto el gobierno. Aquí se ve con experiencia útil ser compatibles las ocupaciones de galán y ministro, de senador y Rey, de muger y consejera. (f. *6r)

What exactly does it mean to say that Reason of State holds a chair in the Academy of Love? And how do politics find a space in amorous sweet-talk? To suggest that the business of lovers and ministers is compatible is to recognize not only that those who hold office are human, and thus prone to desire, but also, and more profoundly, that there is a reciprocal link between love and the state. It is up to the reader to provide their own gloss on these lapidary assertions, and I shall argue that this is precisely what Pedro Calderón de la Barca did when he adapted Pellicer’s translation for the stage at a crucial turning point in his theatrical career.

From page to stage: the “Calderonization” of *Argenis*

The first recorded reference to Calderón’s version comes in 1636, when Diego de Cárdenas and his wife, the actor María de Balbín, signed a contract to perform the play in rural Castile. The following year it was published in the *Segunda parte* of Calderón’s *comedias*, alongside some of his most famous works, such as *El médico de su honra*, *A secreto agravio, secreta venganza*, and *El mayor encanto amor*.¹ The

1. The contract was signed in July for performances in Buendía, scheduled for October of that year (Davis 1991: 218). Vara López finds evidence for palace performances in the late xviii (2015: 17). No manuscript survives. It is the second work in the *Segunda Parte*, flanked by *El mayor encanto*

first two *Partes*, of course, provide no evidence for more precise dating, so that all we can say with certainty is that Calderón could have adapted Barclay's romance at any time during the ten years between the publication of the two Spanish translations in 1626 and the performance contract of 1636. Alicia Vara López, however, suggests a likely date of 1627-1629, given the vogue for Byzantine romances at the end of the 1620s, and assuming that Calderón adapted the work shortly after the publication of his source (2015: 15-17). She also argues, on lexical and stylistic grounds, that of the two Spanish translations, Calderón adapted Pellicer's version, rather than the freer rendering of Gabriel del Corral, *La prodigiosa historia de los dos amantes Argenis y Poliarco, en prosa y verso* (Madrid: Juan González, 1626). Both translators seem to have positioned themselves on opposing sides of the debate over Gongorine esthetics and, as we may infer from the style and conceits of Pellicer's prologue quoted above, his version would certainly have appealed to Calderón's taste for ornate rhetoric and grandiloquent *culturano*.²

Needless to say, Calderón's rhetoric is no mere surface gloss: as in the case of his better known works, the power and meaning of *Argenis y Poliarco* derive in large measure from his manipulation of language and verbal artifice. Although there is much debate over the politics of Calderón's plays, and indeed the ideological function of Golden Age drama in general, he is no longer regarded as the transparent conduit of Catholic orthodoxy, monarchical absolutism and social conservatism. More nuanced approaches present him as a multifaceted author—the term sometimes used in Spanish is *poliédrico*, literally “polyhedral” or “polyhedric”, meaning multifaceted or many-sided.³ The more obvious geometrical resonance of the Spanish term is especially apt: Calderón's dramaturgy is characterized by its theatrical geometry; the artful patterns woven by words, staging and movement capture and project the typical Baroque fascination with man trapped between providential design and human chaos. Indeed, although Calderón translated Barclay's romance into his particular theatrical idiom, he surely noted the structural artistry of his source, which J. IJsewijn compares to the “meticulously regular plans of Renaissance gardens and villas” (1983: 13-15).

amor and *El galán fantasma*. Vera Tassis (1686 edition) moves *Argenis y Poliarco* down to sixth place, possibly because he ordered the plays according to his assessment of their textual quality and extent of authorial revision (Fernández Mosquera 2005). Vara López argues that the surviving text derives from a performance copy that was not revised for publication, the *acotaciones* being in the imperative, not the usual third person (2015: 92). I return to the significance of the *Segunda Parte* below.

2. For the source identification, see Vara López (2012). Davis shows that both Spanish translators used the second Paris edition of *Argenis*, which includes important editorial revisions to Book II, concerning the treatment of heretics (1983: 36-37). He concludes his comparison of their prose style (1983: 37-40) by finding Pellicer “more stylized, more Latinate, but his Castilian is somewhat stilted” (39).

3. Rodríguez Cuadros, for example, notes scholarly fascination with “la mirada *poliédrica* de Calderón: el mundo como voluntad de múltiples representaciones” (undated online article “Calderón heterogéneo, Calderón heterodoxo”); see also Carreño-Rodríguez (2009: 224).

In spite of its many digressions, formal disquisitions and narrative convolutions the tale is told with “balance and symmetry” (Riley and Huber 2004: 15). Carefully distributed over five books, its narrative and thematic core is located in the work’s arithmetical centre, book three, which itself is arranged symmetrically around a meeting between the two lovers Poliarchus and Argenis.⁴

The esthetic attractions of *Argenis* also enhanced its potential for advancing Calderón’s career. The decade 1626-1636 (the *termini a quo* and *ad quem* of the adaptation) saw him promote and consolidate his literary and social status, culminating by 1637 in royal patronage, knighthood in the Order of Santiago, and the publication of the first two *Partes* of his plays. Barclay’s immediate and astonishing European success was there to be exploited, just as Calderón’s tendency to rewrite pre-existing plays and fiction enabled him, like other dramatists, to capitalize on popular trends, to outdo predecessors and rivals, and to position himself in a competitive literary field. For these reasons, perhaps, he also inserted into *Argenis y Poliarco* allusions to *Don Quijote* and *Amadís de Gaula* and allowed us glimpses of contemporary satire of *culterano* affectation, even as he coloured his own verse with a Gongorine hue.⁵ But there is another possible dimension to the connection that can be made between *Argenis* and this particular decade in Calderón’s career: his military service in Italy and Flanders put him at the heart of the very European rivalries and conflicts that shaped the politics of Barclay’s romance. And what happens to Barclay’s politics is, in a nutshell, the question that has most preoccupied those few scholars who have written about Calderón’s play.

Notwithstanding its interest for understanding Calderón’s dramaturgy at a formative stage in his career, *Argenis y Poliarco* has not captured critical imagination. Following Lida de Malkiel’s account of Barclay’s fortunes in Spain (1966), Charles Davis wrote two major articles on the popularity and influence of the Neo-Latin romance, providing detailed and perceptive analyses of the two translations and the stylistic, narrative and thematic consequences of Calderón’s adaptation for the stage (1983, 1991). These important studies have been complemented, but not superseded, by Liliane Picciola (2001) and Antonio Cruz Casado (2002), who working independently also traced the main features of Calderón’s dramatization. However, although these two scholars added some insights of their own, the most important recent advances were made by Alicia Vara López, whose doctoral research led to a series of valuable articles (2011*a*, 2011*b*, 2012, 2013*a*, 2013*b*) and a critical edition with a lucid introductory study (2015).

When viewed as a whole, these studies allow us to summarize the basic strategies that Calderón employed in order to condense this long romance

4. For more details on structure, see Jacqueline Glomski’s introduction to this cluster.

5. See Davis (1991: 227 and 229) and Vara López (2015: 49-52). Lida de Malkiel argues that Barclay himself was influenced by *Amadís* (1966: 225-227).

(454 *in quarto* folios in Pellicer's Spanish version), so that it could fit within the formal conventions of the three-act *comedia* as it was evolving from the model set by Lope in the previous generation. The most obvious task was to simplify the plot and prune its cast of characters in such a way as to preserve a sense of narrative complexity without losing dramatic impact and concision. For example, Calderón dispenses with Radiobanes, the troublesome and ambitious king of Sardinia, who is one of Argenis's many suitors. Although we may speculate upon its political motives, the dramatic effect of the cut is what matters here.⁶ The Sicilian king Meleandro now has only one military enemy, Lidogenes, and Poliarco now contends with only one love rival, Arcombrotto (Davis 1991: 221). Thus, the plot now turns upon the familiar device of a love triangle —between Argenis, Poliarco and Arcombrotto— and the twists and turns occasioned by this amorous rivalry now weave their way through a much simplified representation of political instability. However, to achieve its own specific effects, a three-act *comedia* has no need to reproduce the narrative range and structure of a Byzantine romance: reducing the complexities of the novel intensifies, rather than diminishes, the theatrical impact of the twin themes of love and politics and sets into sharper focus the interplay between them as two forms of intrigue and desire.

Needless to say, translating Barclay for the Spanish stage entailed more than simplifying its plot for heightened theatrical and thematic effect. The consequences of what Vara López calls the "Calderonization" of Barclay's romance can be seen and heard throughout the play's verbal and visual texture: in Calderón's rhetorical style and ornate diction; in the patterns of symbols and images (especially the four elements) that lend thematic and structural coherence; in other structural devices, such as dramatic irony and foreshadowing; in his deployment of favoured motifs, like the horoscope that warns Meleandro of the dangers posed by his daughter's beauty; in a range of theatrical resources, such as asides and staging; and in characterization, notably when Calderón transforms Barclay's Gelanorus into Gelanor, the conventional comic *gracioso*, who, besides advancing the plot, provides tonal contrast and a running commentary on events.⁷ Gelanor's knowing asi-

6. As Davis (1991: 220-221) and Cruz Casado (2002: 361) point out, in the interpretative key that accompanied some editions after 1627 (Paris, Elzevier), Radiobanes was identified as Phillip II (Poliarchus was thought to be Henry of Navarre, the future French king, Henry IV, while Meleander was Henry III, Hianisbe was Elizabeth I, and Argenis, an anagram of "Reginas", was associated with the French kingdom itself). The 1632 Latin edition published in Segovia lacks this interpretative key, though it does have an index. Calderón's cast list is even more reduced than Du Ryer's second adaptation, as Picciola points out (2001: 123); for her comparison of the Spanish and French versions of the plot, see 123-128. I return to some of her insights below. For Du Ryer, see Michael Meere's contribution to this volume.

7. For rhetoric and style, see Vara López (2015: 57-90); for the four elements, particularly fire and water (apt for volcanic Sicily), see Vara López (2011); see Wilson (1936) and Thacker (2007: 114) for their widespread use in Calderonian drama. Davis comments on Calderón's insertion of the

des to the audience, his general cynicism and occasional parodic conduct produce some of the metatheatrical effects that Jonathan Thacker and others have found to be such a productive feature of Golden Age drama: when the theatrical illusion is momentarily broken, and the audience is made aware of both the empowerment and deceptions of role playing, they contemplate the theatricality of their own lives. These metatheatrical touches are a powerful resource for playwrights who wished to foster “a dramatic debate on the state and nature of society in seventeenth-century Spain” (Thacker 2002: 3; see also 2007: 94 and 97). But there is no need to rehearse all these features in detail here; they will be obvious to anyone with passing familiarity with Calderón’s work and I will return to the most relevant aspects, and the scholarship on them, in the course of my own analysis.

Whereas it is relatively straightforward to describe, empirically, what happens to Barclay’s text in the translation from page to stage, what happens to its meaning is another matter. For Davis and Vara López, there is no doubt: to condense the romance, Calderón excises the plot’s political strands, or pushes them off stage, and removes Barclay’s disquisitions on good government and social order. His translation sieves out the politics, and the residue is a drama of amorous intrigue, a *comedia palaciega*. As Davis puts it:

en la comedia los dos galanes son ante todo amantes celosos, mientras en la novela actúan siempre como príncipes. [...] Esto a su vez refleja un cambio general en el carácter de la obra; la política ya queda completamente subordinada al amor. No sólo se omiten las “disquisiciones didácticas”, sino que la propia rebelión de Lidogenes tiene lugar fuera de la escena, y su derrota, como acabamos de ver, es ya un pretexto para realzar la rivalidad amorosa de los galanes. (1991: 228-229)

Moreover, the denouement changes. Whereas Barclay has Archombrotus marry Poliarchus’s sister, who is introduced only for this purpose, Calderón’s Arcombroto is paired off with Timoclea: the revision diminishes the political element of the original, in which Sicily, Mauritania and France become dynastically linked (1983: 229).

Vara López follows a similar line: the political element is minimized “al reglarlo fuera de escena, suprimirlo sin más o subordinarlo al amor” (2015: 36). Thus, Calderón produces a play that is “ante todo amorosa”, precisely in order to avoid any “lectura comprometedora que pudiese frenar los deseos de medro del dramaturgo en el ámbito cortesano” (39). Indeed, the denouement to his adaptation demonstrates “la omnipotencia de la monarquía establecida” (39).

horoscope motif (1991: 224), citing Parker (1982) for its use in other plays, notably *La vida es sueño*; see also Cruz Casado (2002: 364) for other parallels with *La vida*. Picciola (2001: 129-130) and Vara López (2013*b*) have analysed the characterization of Gelanor and his role as *gracioso*. For Davis, the play’s staging would have been relatively simple (1991: 230); his conclusions have been qualified by Vara López’s diligent survey of the play’s theatrical resources and effects (2015: 91-107).

Vara López does not provide a detailed thematic analysis of *Argenis y Poliarco*, although she is clearly cautious about political readings, arguing that they are legitimate only in so far as they do not throw out of focus other, more obvious, elements in a play.⁸

What this critic understands by a political reading is unclear, yet her caution is symptomatic of broader debates over Calderón's politics as well as over the political nature of Golden Age drama more generally.⁹ Yet the "Calderonization" of Barclay is surely more than a matter of form. One of the reasons why *Argenis y Poliarco* deserves greater critical attention is precisely because it dramatizes the interweaving of the political and the personal, the public and the private, in a way that typifies the finest Calderonian dramas, such as *El médico de su honra*, also published in the *Segunda Parte* of 1637. The order of the plays in this collection is certainly compelling evidence for how Calderón conceived the mode of his adaptation: *Argenis y Poliarco* is second, lying between two *comedias palaciegas*, *El mayor encanto amor* and *El galán fantasma*. Moreover, his version of Barclay shares a whole range of motifs with other early palatine dramas: noble or royal protagonists, frequent foreign locations, role playing, often to escape perceived injustice at court, hidden lineages revealed through tokens, the interweaving of amorous and political intrigue. Yet as Alejandro García Reidy has argued, Calderón often exploits these motifs for metatheatrical ends, inspiring critical reflection on the nature of power, especially "los mecanismos simbólicos del poder" (2011: 185). In *Argenis y Poliarco*, the political actions that drive the plot —rebellion, assassination attempts, war— are pushed off stage, but this is where, paradoxically, they produce their most powerful theatrical effect. Calderón's great achievement in this play is to dramatize how power circulates through the body politic and how the here and now are shaped by actions that take place, or are thought to take place, elsewhere or at another time. And for this, he needs to exploit both real and imagined theatrical space.

Out of the wings: the politics of *Argenis y Poliarco*

Suene dentro un clarín y ruido de desembarcación y digan marineros y Arcombrotos:

Dentro: Dé el esquite en la playa
y en él a tierra el africano vaya.

Arcombrotos: Dejadme en ella solo,
que en esta selva consagrada a Apolo

8. "La lectura política puede existir y es legítima, siempre y cuando no implique un desenfoque y distorsión en la contemplación de los demás componentes de la comedia, claramente preeminentes" (2015: 39).

9. Since José Antonio Maravall's analysis of the Baroque as a "guided culture" (1975), the ideological function of Golden Age theatre has been much debated. For an excellent overview, with ample bibliography, see Bass (2013).

quiero quedarme libre del ultraje
 del viento.
 Dentro: En paz te queda.
 Arcombrotto: ¡Buen viaje!
 Agora sale:
 Salude el peregrino
 que en salado cristal abrió camino
 la tierra donde llega.¹⁰

Offstage: we hear a trumpet blast, the clamour of sailors on a rough sea, a screaming wind, a parting exchange; we picture a man deposited on the shoreline, a movement of his head as he looks at the mountain forest before him then back to the waves; the stranger enters the stage. There is nothing at all unusual in beginning a play with a protagonist emerging from a world of warring elements. But here the convention will acquire a specific resonance for a play in which what we see and hear are in constant movement and constantly interrupted by events elsewhere. Sight and sound, whether real or conjured up by Calderón's verse, take on a kinetic quality, compelling the audience to imagine the onstage action as being open to and dependent upon a world "out there", off stage. The initial setting, the shoreline, becomes a symbolic threshold. The stranger is momentarily positioned between stillness ("en paz te queda"), a departure point for his own journey into the wildness of the symbolic "selva", and the continuation of lives that follow other paths ("buen viaje").

The stranger begins his tale: his conventional explanatory speech informs the audience that he is in Sicily, that he seeks fame and fortune in Trinacrium, "fénix de las ciudades", that he is "un africano", that... "¡Válgame el cielo!". A woman's scream interrupts his story (l. 24), and as he rushes towards the direction of the sound, down from the mountain forest (the *corral* balcony) runs Timoclea. Explaining that a young nobleman is in mortal combat with three *bandoleros*, she points offstage:

Vuelve los ojos a esa parte y mira
 cómo el gallardo joven los retira
 y la vitoria de los tres pretende:
 con tal maña los defiende. (ll. 45-48)

Arcombrotto charges off, we hear the sounds of a struggle, and two of the bandits enter, with swords drawn, run across the stage, and disappear again into

10. Lines 1-9. All quotations are cited by line numbers of Vara López's 2015 edition. Her critical apparatus registers a variation to the *acotación* in Vera Tassis's edition: "Descubrese el teatro, que será de marina, y suena dentro ruido de desembarcar, y dize Arcombrotto: y Marineros dentro". Vara López also points out that the start of Arcombrotto's speech reproduces almost verbatim an opening passage from *El mayor encanto, amor*.

the wings, chased by Poliarco and Arcombrotto. These two men pause to identify themselves. Once Arcombrotto has explained who he is (adding more details to his previous revelations), it is Poliarco's turn. But before he can answer, Timoclea interrupts: she invites them to her estate and, having described the path they are to follow, she departs to prepare for their arrival (136). Partial disclosure, needless to say, is a dramatic necessity, but Calderón's staging invests narrative convenience with thematic and symbolic weight. For what we have witnessed up to this point, and what we shall continue to witness in a variety of modes and formats, is a sequence of words and movements on and off stage that constitutes a structure for the entire play: a theatrical world of lives and journeys, whether seen or described, that are forever interrupted, intersecting, bifurcating, a world of unsynchronized action, a world of untimeliness.¹¹

This lack of synchronicity is enacted on the stage: Timoclea's exit coincides with the entrance of Poliarco's lackey, the *gracioso* Gelanor, who rushes in, late, in a state of comic undress ("en cuerpo"), and in hot pursuit of the bandits. Visual and verbal comedy combine, as Gelanor gives a mock heroic account of his inept and cowardly conduct in the recent offstage struggle (137-149). Our laughter generates a critical distance on the action; as Liliane Picciola argues, distancing characterizes Calderón's entire approach to Barclay's romance.¹² Our laughter may be directed at Gelanor, but it makes us aware of ideas and values that are more generally significant: now, he is empowered by rage ("cólera"), but not then; though his sword, hat and cape were stolen, he kept a pistol hidden in his underwear; when asked why he didn't use it to defend himself "a mejor tiempo" (150), he replies that that was his "secreto/ notable" (154-155). Appearances, secrets, manliness (the phallic pistol stuffed down his pants), and, above all else, chasing after the action are crucial themes in a play in which the protagonists can never keep up with what happens around them. Gelanor's late arrival is the first of several time lags that structure the plot, and much of its significance lies in its staging. As we read the script, the brief scene appears to be static, a comic pause in the action. But when Poliarco and Arcombrotto resume their conversation, we realize that at least part of it must have taken place while the three men were walking across the stage through the imagined forest. For as soon as Gelanor has finished speaking Arcombrotto observes: "Ya, pues, que los dos nos

11. For Davis, the rhetorical patterns generated by Calderón's verse, coupled with parallel actions and characterization, serves to "subrayar implícitamente la inevitabilidad providencial de las cosas: estamos en un universo que parece obedecer a un elegante esquema preestablecido" (1991: 225). For reasons that will become clearer I think he has grasped only one part of the dialectic of structured chaos.

12. Although spectators sometimes observe "avec quelque distance amusée", at other times they are more dispassionate: "Calderón incite au désabusement". Picciola concludes: "tant vaut la lecteur, ou le spectateur, dont on espère qu'il saura prendre la distance nécessaire par rapport à l'action, tant vaut la pièce" (2001: 126, 128, 136).

vemos/ a vista dese palacio/ que hospedaje ha de ser nuestro,/ por el camino podéis/ ir, señor, satisfaciendo/ a las deudas en que os puse/ cuando os conté mis sucesos” (168-174). The bond (“deudas”) between the two noblemen is visually reinforced by their physical proximity, while Gelanor hovers to one side, a comic irrelevance on the margins of the main action, literally and figuratively out of step.

And yet, like a grotesque figure drawn in the margins of an illuminated manuscript, Gelanor also provides a comic gloss on the untimeliness of the two companions striding through the forest. As they walk, Poliarco tells his tale: he is a French nobleman, exiled by “el amor y la fortuna” (187); he came to Sicily to help King Meleandro, a wise and kindly ruler whose peaceful temperament was exploited by the arrogant rebel Lidogenes, who aspired to usurp the king and marry his beautiful daughter Argenis; a horoscope had predicted that her beauty would sow discord among “príncipes extranjeros” (309), so Meleandro had hidden her away for her protection and that of the kingdom (an action that produces the very thing he hoped to forestall); Poliarco had managed to find his way in to her fortress retreat; he will not reveal how he got in (“vivir me importa el callarlo/ y no os importa saberlo”, 323-324); and just as he is on the verge of explaining why he took this risk, screams ring out: “¡Al fuego, al fuego!” (328).¹³ In rushes Timoclea and, pointing back offstage, she explains that “esas llamas [...] esas voces” (347, 350) signal treason in Sicily and that the king, having closed all ports, is in search of a traitor. Gelanor is sent to discover the facts, and Poliarco resumes his story (391): a group of rebels attacked Argenis’s secret palace (“este alcázar de mujeres”, 395), and fearing lest he be caught he fled, only to turn back in an attempt to save Meleandro and his daughter; at first unsuccessful—he arrived too late—he finally fought off the traitors; having revealed his identity to Argenis, but concealed it from the king, he once again left the palace, while the merciful Meleandro arranged a peace treaty with the rebels; “corrido [...] afrentado” by the king’s proposed pact, he decided to abandon the court—“no sé si te diga huyendo” (484)—and it was at this point that he encountered the bandits assaulting Timoclea. His speech conjures up a tangle of paths and it is peppered by references to flight, his and other people’s (407, 422, 427, 446, 484); he appears to us not just as an exiled French *chevalier* but as an icon of movement: his speeches are the pauses between travel, and the stage is the place in-between.

That Poliarco has been overtaken by events is clear from the news brought back by Gelanor (495-526): the fires have been lit for him, and a mob is in

13. In Barclay’s original, Poliarchus gains access to Argenis by dressing as a woman; Pierre Du Ryer created an entire play out of the cross-dressing episode in his *Théocrine* (see Meere’s essay in this cluster). The parenthetical remark of Calderón’s Poliarco may be read as a knowing aside to those in the audience familiar with the play’s source.

pursuit, believing him to be the traitor who had assassinated Lidogene's ambassador, endangered "el bien común del Estado", and undermined the king's authority. And how does Gelanor know all this? He has it on the anonymous authority of "un hombre" (503): an unverifiable source, word of mouth, in short, a rumour. The detail is significant for, as we shall see, in Calderón's version of Barclay's absolutist monarchy, political order never emanates directly from the centre or travels in straight lines from the king to his subjects. In response to these rumours held as public truths, Timoclea devises a counter rumour that Poliarco has drowned while trying to escape. While Gelanor spreads this news, she and Arcombroto will go ahead to prepare a hiding place, a dark mountain cave, the route to which she describes in a sequence of poetic *redondillas* that enable the audience to conjure up the scenery in their mind's eye (618-642; once again Calderón weaves poetry out of paths). They leave, and Poliarco and Gelanor walk on; as they cross the stage with its Gongorine verbal décor —"por el abismo/ desta umbrosa competencia" (647-648)— Poliarco instructs Gelanor to tell Arsidas (a trustworthy confidante of Argenis) that he is in fact alive and that he should pass this secret on to the princess. At this point, an incredulous Gelanor asks why not just reveal the truth and tell everyone you are the French Dauphin (663-667)? Poliarco cuts him short, curses his stupidity, and stalks off. Gelanor's interruption serves two purposes: he voices the audience's own incredulity at the protagonists' labyrinthine plans and he complicates the plot even further by hinting at a further narrative thread, namely that Poliarco is not who he claims to be.

The first scene closes with Gelanor putting the two plans into action. Arsidas arrives in company with Timonides. Gelanor tells the lie (in *culterano* verse) to Timonides, who leaves the stage to inform the court, and (in plain speech) the truth to Arsidas, who runs to intercept Timonides before he can reach Argenis. Once again, physical movement and poetry combine for thematic effect. Calderón highlights the duality of the mission by means of Gelanor's contrasting linguistic registers and the verbal symmetry of the episode's frame, which describes how good and bad news travel at different speeds.¹⁴ In fact, the staggered journeys of Timonides and Gelanor, each bearing a different version of events, constitute a variant on one of the play's central visual motifs: the double mission. Earlier, we saw how Timonides, Arcombroto and Poliarco set out for the lady's *quinta* at different times; later, the first scene of act II ends, like act I, scene 1, with a double mission. Eristenes and Lidoro realize that their original plot to assassinate the king with a poisoned sash has gone astray, since he donated it to Argenis, and she in turn has asked Arsidas to take it to Poliarco (see below). They wonder what will happen if Poliarco does not take the poisoned

14. "Porque llevas,/ Timonides, malas nuevas/ y es fuerza que llegues presto" (Arsidas, 764-766); "porque llevas buenas nuevas/ y es fuerza que llegas tarde" (Gelanor to Arsidas, 797-798)

sash from Arsidas. Eristenes comes up with an “industria”: Lidoro should follow him and watch; if Poliarco takes the sash and puts it on, return to Sicily; if not, then hand Poliarco a letter, revealing part of the truth, that the sash is poisoned, but concealing within this truth a lie, that the king wants to assassinate him. Thus, if one plot fails then they will succeed in another, to turn Poliarco into a traitor.¹⁵ And the entire play concludes with yet another variation on the same motif: queen Hianisbe sends two letters following a single route from Africa to Sicily which reveal to Meleandro the secret pasts, desires and destinies of the protagonists. In this case, however, the double mission brings resolution and harmony and illustrates how Calderón uses the offstage journey as fundamental structural device for a variety of theatrical and thematic effects.

The first scene (1-798) possesses an obvious symbolic setting, as the characters move into and through a forest that is both literal and figurative. The second takes us out of the real forest and into the court; and yet we remain in what one later political theorist would call the “selva política” of intrigue and indirection.¹⁶ For this scene begins with Argenis and her confidante Selenisa reflecting on the allegations of Poliarco’s treachery. Lamenting that the *vulgo* has caught the king in rumour’s web (821-822), Argenis determines to hide her cares from her father and veil her grief with false joy (811-812). This exchange transcends its obvious narrative function; what we see performed on stage is part of a chain reaction: in response to an imaginary event, created by a lie, spread by word of mouth and endorsed by the king, Argenis comes up with a fiction of her own. This fiction is then fed back to Meleandro, as he enters in the company of the treacherous ambassadors, Lidoro and Eristides, “con una caja y una banda en ella”. There is no need to detail exactly how, from this point on, Calderón thickens the plot and gradually quickens the pace for dramatic effect. For my purposes, what matters is how he resorts to the same theatrical techniques deployed in scene one: choreographed movement, interruptions, and offstage voices turn Barclay’s plot into a drama of perspective, of action and reaction, of plans and people gone astray.

King Meleandro confirms his belief in what we know to be a lie—that Poliarco is a traitor—and from the casket of jewels brought by the ambassadors as a peace token, he picks out a beautifully embroidered sash and hands it over to Argenis, “como padre y amante/ de tu hermosura” (829-830). Aghast, Eristenes remarks that the sash “es prenda de soldado/ más que de dama”, exclaiming in

15. This is analogous to the “industria” devised by queen Hianisbe, described in the very next scene: she spread the rumour that she was pregnant and then adopted her sister Ana’s child as her own. With one fiction, she recalls, she would achieve two things: “Tú estarás/ segura de afrentosa/ opinión; yo viviré/ major casada; de forma/ que se sigan dos fetos/ juntos de una causa sola” (1582-85).

16. See Bernardino de Rebolledo’s didactic poem *Selva militar y política* (1661). Calderón used the forest to similar symbolic effect in *La selva confusa* (ca. 1622), which, as García Reidy explains, also weaves together political and amorous intrigue, role playing and tokens of identity (2011: 189-194).

an aside that the gift enclosed a secret “daño” (850-855; we later discover it is poisoned). The transmission of the sash from the ambassadorial casket, to the king and then to his daughter needs to be theatrical, an ostentatious gesture. Structurally, the act of handing over becomes a visual motif that will be repeated throughout the play. For in this work not only do people and words go on erratic journeys, but objects too: besides the sash, there are two jewels, two sets of letters, as well as a casket containing tokens of Arcombrotó's secret identity. We witness all of them being passed from hand to hand. Symbolically, the king's gesture, like the other instances of transference, signifies the unpredictable circulation of power throughout the body politic; for the sash itself, in its dangerous beauty, is the symbolic equivalent of the king's daughter, herself another token of the state.¹⁷

The subsequent action is a welter of reversals in meaning and movement: Timonides brings word that Poliarco is dead (the word itself having followed a tortuous path, from peasants to Gelanor, to him, to the court; 885); *exeunt* the king, Eristides and Timonides (897); Argenis laments; Arsidas enters with the truth (949); joy is interrupted by offstage shouting: “¡Muera Poliarco, muera!” (984); the voices force an anxious Meleandro back on stage; Timonides follows and, having been a herald of death, he now announces that Poliarco lives; fearing the king's wrath, Timoclea's servants are even now bringing him captive; fearing the mob, they have covered his face; Poliarco is dragged on; he is unmasked—he is Arcombrotó! This is indeed, as Arcombrotó declares, the palace of Circe (1031-32).

The effect of this *coup de théâtre* depends on the multiple responses it provokes, both on stage and in the audience. Staging highlights the diverse perspectives and the conflict between private and public lives, the masked and the unmasked. For all the while, Argenis, in a series of emotional asides uttered on the edge of the main action, expresses her doubts about intervening openly and revealing her secret life. But the audience's attention is now focussed centre stage, on the bond that is forming between two men, the old king and the youthful stranger. Having learned that Arcombrotó is an African who harbours a secret but has pledged not to disclose it, and gazing in admiration at his noble mien, Meleandro fondly recalls his own life as a “peregrino Úlises” in Mauritania (1083) and hints at a secret love of his own. Meleandro and his entourage depart, leaving Arcombrotó, Argenis, and Selenisa behind, exchanging courteous words and admiring glances. In a final aside, Arcombrotó declares a sudden passion for the princess. Poliarco, whose alleged betrayal drove the action, is

17. As Eristenes declares: “en su hermosura cubierta/ la muerte, como entre flores/ el áspid, porque está llena de veneno” (1421-24). He is describing the sash, but his words could equally apply to Argenis, according to the anxious fantasies of her two male suitors, not to mention her own father, a jealous “amante de su hermosura”.

out of sight and though his name is no longer mentioned, his presence is felt, resonating in the political and amorous fantasies of those on stage. The first act began with a threat to the state, motivated by a desire for power, and channelled symbolically onto the bodies of two women (the attempted kidnapping first of *Argenis* and then of *Timoclea*); it ends with a threat to love and friendship posed by the erotic yearning of *Arcombroto*. Sexual and political appetites are bound together, and, like a poisoned sash, they encircle the body of *Argenis*.

The opening act demonstrates how, for all its surprises, narrative strands and offstage interruptions, *Argenis y Poliarco* is remarkably fluent, held together and set in motion by motifs and ideas that weave their way through the play like variations on a theme.¹⁸ And as these variations unfold, love and politics are more tightly interlaced. Rather than work my way sequentially through each scene, in the remainder of this essay I will select episodes that illustrate how the patterns established in act I evolve and to what thematic effect. As we shall see in the discussion of the following four examples, the choreography of movement on and off stage turns love and politics into highly compatible dancing partners.

Politics and desire: four movements from a suite of dances

Theatre, like dance, has the power to represent an idea by movement in and through space. The British director and dramaturge, Laurence Boswell, noted for his productions of Golden Age drama, “speaks of the theatrical act in terms of movement through spacetime. In his words, a play is a ‘dance of unresolvable conflicts’” (Vidler 2012: 42). The analogy with choreography helps underscore the capacity of movement and space to convey themes, character, and social relations. After all, early modern dance treatises emphasized that dance was an expression of social and cosmic order.¹⁹ Spatial expression includes how actors enter and leave the stage, where they stand in relation to each other and to the audience, their speed and direction across the stage, their physical gestures and posture, and the way they exploit the spatial resources of the *corral* (its doors, balconies, inner space, and so forth). The following four examples illustrate how, in the theatre, space and movement work in tandem with language; speech extends the physical space of the stage by describing movements and actions that take place elsewhere, in the past, present or future.

The first act of *Argenis y Poliarco* has a pronounced kinetic quality, as characters flow on and off stage, the physical embodiment of meanings that are

18. As Vara López points out, Calderón frequently links characters “en cadena, con lo cual consigue una mayor cohesión en el desarrollo de la comedia” (2015: 36 note).

19. A point emphasized in Vidler’s analysis of the “cultural choreography” of Boswell’s production of *Fuenteovejuna*. Juan de Esquivel Navarro resorts to the conventional analogy between dance and the cosmic order to introduce his *Discursos Sobre el Arte del Dançado* (Navarro 1642: 1r); on which see Brooks (2003).

forever being veiled, revealed and reinterpreted. This dynamic movement of people and perspectives is especially effective in the opening scene of act II (1116-1465). Structurally, this scene has two parts that pivot around a central event taking place out of the audience's sight, when Meleandro's carriage careers into a lake (another journey gone awry). On either side of this unseen catastrophe, Calderón crafts a sequence of entrances and exits that creates a scene of rhythmic symmetry: first, three women (Argenis, Timoclea and Selenisa) discourse on love; Selenisa departs, only for the number to swell with the arrival of Arcombrotto and his attendants; they witness Meleandro's accident and after he is carried back onstage by his saviour Arcombrotto, the characters gradually drift away leaving behind the two traitors, Lidoro and Eristenes. This scene begins with love and ends with politics, linked in a seamless flow of action that begins slowly, speeds up, then slows down once more. By this point, therefore, the play has moved from politics to love (act I) and back again to politics. The thematic parallels are underscored by the setting. Like act I, act II opens in the forest, but the original "selvas de Apolo", the site of treason, now become the "amorasas selvas" where Argenis reflects upon her love for Poliarco. Moreover, like act I, act II also begins with a parting of the ways, as Argenis sends Selenisa off so she can talk in secret to Timoclea about her beloved. The movement off stage links love and politics, since Selenisa interprets her perfunctory dispatch from her mistress's presence as a sign that she is no longer within a trusted inner circle.²⁰ Conversely, Arcombrotto's entrance with the king in his arms marks his rise to "privanza y grandeza" (1325).

In contrast to the varied rhythms of act II, scene 1, a later episode of this act (1922-2089) possesses the more stately pace of a *pavana*. In gratitude for saving her father's life, Argenis had given Arcombrotto a jewel, which he mistakenly interpreted as a sign of her love. But even so, he was confused by her disdain (1375-1412). The next time we meet him, he re-enters an empty stage, pondering his fate: "no sé qué camino siga" (1932); and indirection is indeed his course of action. He determines to play with speech and silence, letting actions signify his "calidad", "y callaré así la verdad/ y la sospecha diré". He turns himself into the walking embodiment of suspicion, the physical incarnation of one of the play's main themes, namely, the circulation of doubt through the body politic. He takes on this role wilfully and begins to perform it as Selenisa enters the stage.

Calderón's stage directions at this juncture are calculated. He has Selenisa enter gradually ("Vaya saliendo Selenisa [...] Salga Selenisa"; 1943, 1951), so that she is not immediately within earshot of Arcombrotto, who describes her

20. The separation symbolizes too the gap between appearance and reality, as Selenisa complains of an apparent snub: "¿Qué ha visto en mí que no sea lealtad y amor?" (1129-30). Just as she complains of having been misinterpreted so she misreads Argenis, and the two become mutually misread signs.

as if she were still within Argenis's inner circle, "siendo la privanza/ de Argenis" (1944-45). So, as she moves towards Arcombrotto, we see her in an ambivalent light, both inside and outside a circle of trust. The pace of the staging gives us time to dwell on her duality. Arcombrotto hails her and gives her the jewel gifted to him by Argenis. He asks her to examine it closely, then leaves the stage in one direction only to return a short while later from another ("por otra puerta"); meanwhile Selenisa, puzzled, contemplates the jewel, its meaning and why she had been given it. When the nobleman returns, the two exchange hints and doubts about their relationship with Argenis. They hover on the verge of confession, prevented from revealing their true feelings by Selenisa warning that Poliarco is on his way ("viene Poliarco", 2030). The entire exchange is framed by Arcombrotto's circular movement and the pattern traced on stage is reinforced by verbal symmetry. The African nobleman left on a pretence, announcing the imminent arrival of the king: "De palacio/ sale el Rey y aquí los dos/ no es bien que nos halle. Adiós,/ y míralo muy de espacio" (1978-81). Following their exchange, Selenisa departs with the words: "De palacio/ sale Argenis y los dos no estamos bien aquí. Adiós,/ y míralo más de espacio" (2038-41).²¹ Arcombrotto is left alone to re-examine the meaning of the jewel, and his uncertainty deepens: the jewel's meaning has been reversed. "Esta joya, que favor/ juzgué un tiempo [...]/ ya la juzgo, ya la juzgo/ precio vil, merced infame" (2070-76). What gives depth to this brief soliloquy is the way that the motility of the gem's meaning and Arcombrotto's own unstable selfhood are performed by his circular movement on and off stage. What sets the characters in motion and heightens the mood of insecurity is the fearful anticipation of real or imagined interruptions by people arriving from elsewhere.

My third example of symbolic choreography is taken from act III, scene 1 (2340-2513). As in the two previous acts, this one begins with a description of events that occur off stage. Argenis and Timoclea describe a duel between the two jealous rivals that had been interrupted by the king asking for their assistance in quelling Lidogenes's rebellion. With Argenis herself as the prize, the boundary between masculine erotic and political desire dissolves (as Argenis herself recognizes: "[...] he de ser/ el laurel de su alabanza,/ [...]/ trofeo de su valor/ y fin de sus esperanzas", 2400-05). Meleandro appears and describes the victories of the two armies led by Poliarco and Arcombrotto; tension mounts as we anticipate their arrival and with it the fate of Argenis. To the sound of drums and trumpets, each army enters simultaneously "por ambas puertas del tablado", followed by the two rivals "pasando y haciendo cortesía a los reyes" (2420). Their triumphal procession is choreographed by visual and verbal symmetry. The rivals parade before the

21. The same technique is used elsewhere; see above note 14 (764-766 and 797-798); see also the two departures of Argenis and Arcombrotto in act II ("porque en dos causas opuestas/ la misma que me acobarda/ es la misma que me alienta", 1397-99; repeated 1411-13).

king, their speeches interwoven sometimes into single lines of verse, sometimes into longer boasts of roughly equal length. They declaim in increasingly Gongorine terms, but their grandiloquent verbal flyting eventually descends into vulgar threats and insults (2496). The farce ends when Meleandro takes Arcombrotto off stage to adjudicate.²² All we know of their interview is what we later learn from the *vulgo*, when Gelanor enters to report the rumour that the king has sent Arcombrotto on a mission to Africa (2580). Pushing off stage and out of sight a discussion that will decide the destinies of those left on stage is an effective way of giving the audience a theatrical experience of *privanza*.

The play ends with a scene in which sight and sound combine to powerful dramatic effect. We are back in Sicily, with Selenisa and Timoclea singing a love song given parodic counterpoint in Gelanor's incongruous commentaries (3196-3211; 3234-58). The songs create a mood that reflects the audience's own uncertain expectations: we know that the two rivals are on the way, that they have agreed a pact, but we do not yet know how Hianisbe's secret "industria" (3119) will resolve the conflict. Our anticipation is sharpened by the arrival of the king who promises Argenis a happy marriage (3267). Her laconic reply ("y yo también") conceals her uncertainty, while giving voice to ours. It also throws into relief the monarch's complacency: "¿cuánto me obligues/ cuando humilde me obedeces!" (3280-81). The discrepancy between the two perspectives soon modulates into outright bewilderment: "Pero, ¿qué salva es aquesta?" exclaims Meleandro (3282) to an offstage salvo, and Arsidias enters to announce that a ship has reached port: "edificio eminente/ del mar, alcázar con pies,/ y ciudad con alas" (3283-85). The *culterano* confusion of the imagery reproduces in poetic terms the confused reactions of the actors to what they see in the distance. Two men have disembarked and they are on their way, but before they arrive, we visualize them through the astonishment of Meleandro, Argenis and Selenisa, who utter a series of incredulous asides (e.g. "confusión dan", "admiración ofrecen", 3300-01). As Poliarco and Arcombrotto enter, the king and his daughter are each given a line that reflects their conflicting perspectives: *Meleandro*: "Hija, ya viene tu esposo"/ *Argenis*: "Ya veo, señor, que viene" (3302-03). For the king, the "esposo" is Arcombrotto, his political choice; for Argenis, it is Poliarco, her heart's choice.

Arcombrotto and Poliarco now enter, and the play moves to a rapid conclusion. Each in turn gives Meleandro a letter from Hianisbe, which (along with the jewel that identifies Arcombrotto as Túsbal, Meleandro's son) reveals the secret identities of the two rivals and enables Poliarco to marry Argenis. Calderón salvages drama from banality through his staging. In one single sweeping movement, Arcombrotto enters and takes the king to one side: horrified, Argenis and Poliarco see Meleandro, "con el semblante alegre" (3317), embrace the man he

22. Farce later returns when the two squabble, with daggers drawn, in front of Queen Hianisbe, who is unaware that they are rivals in love (3070-3115).

now calls Túsbal. Calderón represents the two letters as mysteries to be solved, as we see the king reading them at a distance from the mystified and expectant bystanders, who attempt to “read” his emotions as he reads the letters. To them, these actions are “enigmas” (3323, 3334). Now Poliarco produces his letter, and it is Arcombrotó’s turn to decipher Meleandro’s joy, while Argenis continues to stand by in a state of agitated bewilderment. The enigmas resolved, Arcombrotó’s disappointment is tempered by the discovery that his royal Sicilian blood entitles him to inherit the island kingdom. The play ends with the marriage of Argenis to Poliarco and Timoclea to Arcombrotó, accompanied by the stage direction “Danse las manos”. However conventional, the final vision of the protagonists coming together to link hands on stage acquires, I would argue, a particularly ironic significance in a play constructed out of so many disconnections between people, places, words and things.

Argenis, símbolo animado, hermosa enigma

Methodologically, it would be possible to summarize the politics of *Argenis y Poliarco* by abstracting from it a set of ideas that are also articulated in contemporary political treatises. One could then present these ideas as Calderón’s lessons on good or bad government, and from here draw inferences about the playwright’s political alignments, particularly with regard to where he stands in relation to contemporary discussions of monarchical absolutism and Reason of State. Indeed, Calderón’s adaptation of *Argenis* furnishes ample material to complement the work done by such scholars as Dian Fox (1986), Margaret Greer (1991), Stephen Rupp (1996), Jodi Campbell (2006) or Antonio Carreño-Rodríguez (2009). He represents, for example, the fragility and arbitrariness of *privanza* through its metaphoric association with amorous desire, and he alludes to a cynical, Machiavellian vision of *razón de estado*.²³ And he dramatizes the corrosive effects of factionalism, by exploiting its semantic overlap with banditry and by employing the symbolically poisoned *banda*.²⁴ He also shows us a king whose well-meaning moderation provokes rebellion, as Poliarco explains at the start of the play (220-40).

23. For Calderón’s interest in *privanza* see Sáez (2015); for Reason of State, see Arcombrotó’s advice to Poliarco not to throw himself on the mercy of the king and protest his innocence: monarchs prefer to sacrifice one life in order to preserve “la quietud [...] de todo un reino”: “el poder/ [...] con capa de justiciero/ mata por Razón de Estado” (564-570).

24. The poisoned sash was a gift from the unseen rebel Lidogenes, brought on stage by his ambassadors, whom we first encounter in the forest posing as “bandoleros”. According to the *Diccionario de autoridades* “banda [...] suele usarse también para significar parcialidad o gente que favorece y sigue el partido de alguno. Lat. *Factio, -ionis*”. And a “bandolero” is “el que sigue algún bando por enemistad y odio que tiene al otro, y se hace al monte, donde los unos y los otros andan foragidos y en continua guerra: y también se extiende a los ladrones y salteadores de caminos. Lat. *Factiosus, Grassator*”.

Moreover, one could also argue that *Argenis y Poliarco* provides the statesman with a lesson in psychology, as recommended by political thinkers who stressed the role played by the human affect in shaping political life (Maravall 1975, Fernández Santamaría 1986). For Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, for example, prudent statecraft depends upon understanding human appetites and inclinations (Fernández-Santamaría 1986: 196). The play's representation of a puzzling, unpredictable world also has affinities with the thought of Juan de Mariana. As Harald Braun has explained, Mariana's *De rege et regis institutione* (Toledo, 1598) demonstrates that political prudence "belongs to the realm of the contingent and uncertain [...]. The political situation will be fluid, and the prince will have to be involved in a continual process of interpretation, a process marked by plurality and contingency. Pervading and distinguishing his argument is a sense of the disturbing volatility of human affairs" (2007: 115-116).²⁵

However, I have not attempted to analyse the play as a distillation of political theory. For although traces of Barclay's political dialogues remain, Calderón's version is not centred on kingship or good government *per se*.²⁶ He does not "address kings and court with a marked formative intent" (Rupp 1996: 170). His principal concern is not what makes a prudent king, nor how the monarch should wield sovereignty and sustain his authority; rather, his interest is man as a political animal, a creature relentlessly driven by desire for a power whose origins and ends are so often out of reach, enigmatic, and contested.

While Calderón is not a Foucauldian *avant la lettre*, Foucault's model of power does help us conceptualize how the Spanish playwright handles the twin themes of love and politics. Like amorous desire, political power is not simply a matter of agency, something that you possess. Like love, it is both possessing and possessive; it circulates unpredictably through the body politic; it demands recognition. When Meleandro is saved from drowning by the foreigner Arcombroto he turns on his attendants and angrily demands to know why they bow and scrape before him: he is not their king, he declares, "porque, si yo lo fuera, / os arrojaráis tras mí / al agua" (1309-11). His power is embodied and enacted by others, as much as by himself; it belongs to a theatre of meaning, where truth must be performed before complicitous spectators: "Porque lleva / gran crédito de su parte / quien habla si sabe o piensa / que el teatro que le escucha / le soleniza y celebra" (1249-53).²⁷

25. Likewise Gracián's *El político* (1640) urged "flexibility in the face of time and change" (Rupp 1996: 173).

26. The most obvious echoes of Barclay are the problems caused by favourites, monarchical mildness, the qualities and roles of courtiers and ambassadors, and the follies of astrologers: for these and other topics, see Riley and Huber (2004: 16-22).

27. For a similar conceptualization of power "as fluid and negotiated relationship", in which "royal power relies on being recognized and accepted by others in order to be valid", see Campbell (2006: especially 16-18, 141).

And largely through the interventions of the *gracioso* Gelanor, Calderón encourages his spectators not to “solemnize and celebrate” the performance of royal and aristocratic power. Various metatheatrical touches remind the audience that what they are watching is a fiction constructed out of the conventions of romance, and that these conventions derive their theatrical power from the tacit assumption that they are part of the natural order of things. Calderón makes them strange. When we first meet queen Hianisbe, she describes her past as if she were reading a book (“dobla a este caso la hoja”, 1587). She is; it was written by Barclay. Later, she yearns nostalgically for her son, Arcombroto, and pictures in her imagination the Sicilian shoreline (2690-709); her desire, she says, has “ojos de lince”, and, hey presto, he appears, as if conjured up out of thin air by her very words. Gelanor sniggers at Poliarco’s quixotic enterprise (1747-53), and though astonished at the coincidence of Lidoro staggering on stage half drowned just when the plot demands it, he welcomes the no less convenient arrival of Arsidas by announcing him like a ringmaster in a circus (1811-20). Moments like these open up that critical distance that Picciola finds to be such a characteristic feature of this play. If one of the functions of metatheatre is to alert audience members to the power of role playing, on and off stage, and to become aware of the theatricality of their own lives, then it prompts the question “who is writing the script?”. However much the protagonists strive to be authors of their own lives, they become aware that their roles and identities are co-scripted—conscripted even—by other actors and by events taking place elsewhere. Moreover, their lives are also not their own because they are caught in an endless chain of recursion: Arcombroto’s passion for Argenis replays the roving desire of his equally rootless father for Ana, the sister of Hianisbe, herself the abandoned love object of an earlier Persian prince. Meleandro’s horoscope warning that his daughter would be fought over by foreign princes is as much a projection of his own guilty past as it is an omen of the future.²⁸

The human chain staged by the actors at the end of the play is, by convention, a symbol of harmonious resolution. Given the chaotic dance they have just performed, this clasping of hands may also appear as desperate gesture of mutual support. Through staging, Calderón has answered Pellicer’s injunction to repay a debt to Barclay. This play’s “living energy” —the term is Laurence Boswell’s— reproduces in theatrical terms the “política viviente” of the original. Through choreographed movement on and off stage, Calderón has turned the *corral* into a staging post for desires that are at once amorous and political: “césar/ de amor, llegué, vi y vencí”, boasts Poliarco (2872-73). Calderón has remained true to the scope of Barclay’s vision of transnational politics, and in adapting this European bestseller he has created a play that is both a product

28. There is ideological affinity here with *La vida es sueño* with its threatening cycles of violence (Rupp 1996: 39-40).

of and a commentary upon the circulation of power and culture through Early Modern Europe. But we should not forget that *Argenis y Poliarco* was also performed in the small town of Buendía, near Cuenca: it is hard to say how piquant the rural audience would have found Calderón's representation of the befuddled elite; it would certainly have understood, through painful experience, the local impact of royal and seigneurial desires that are performed off stage.

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