CHAPTER SEVEN

MANUSCRIPT PAMPHLETS AND MADE-UP PERFORMANCES: NEW SOURCES AND CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION

Nelleke Moser

INTRODUCTION

According to Habermas, the process of formation of public opinion was steered mainly by the printing press. Printed chronicles, newsletters and pamphlets would form the kind of printed news supply that is generally assumed to have fuelled discussions, helping people to form an opinion and to reach consensus on a given issue. However, more recently it has been acknowledged that public opinion was not only formed by printed information that was published periodically. Opinions were also shaped through visual, oral and manuscript media, and the dividing line between public opinion and the point of view of an individual or an elite is more difficult to establish than Habermas would have us believe. Historians have recently become more aware of the dynamics of public opinion, of the various levels on which such an opinion might be formed and of the different media that come into play, especially when discussing the early modern period.¹

In this respect, two types of sources in particular deserve our attention: manuscripts and performances.² Both of them allow for new questions and both imply new challenges. Archives and libraries are booming with early modern manuscript material that has not been studied systematically so far, for want of an inclusive catalogue.³

¹ For a more elaborate discussion of recent reactions to Habermas's idea of 'public sphere' and formation of opinion and its adaptation for the early modern period, see the introductory chapter to this volume by Jan Bloemendal and Arjan van Dixhoorn.

² Cf. Marotti & Bristol, *Print, Manuscript, Performance*; Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*.

³ The *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta* (BNM) focuses on mediaeval and late mediaeval manuscripts, and the *Short Title Catalogue Netherlands* (STCN), the Dutch retrospective bibliography for the period 1540–1800, only includes printed books. A Dutch equivalent of the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700* (CELM) is much called for.

Manuscripts promise to shed new light on the process of formation of opinion because they frequently served to distribute suspicious or subversive texts, and handwritten sources would speak more freely and unequivocally than printed media about issues that were causing tension within society.⁴ Although some have suggested that manuscripts would only have a limited impact on public opinion because they were circulating among a very restricted audience, others have pointed out that manuscript news sometimes even enjoyed a wider distribution than printed texts.⁵ Manuscript sources therefore certainly deserve further investigation. As for performances, the interaction between theatre and formation of opinion has been studied more thoroughly, especially when it comes to the role of drama in the spread of the Reformation.⁶ Drama, like sermon, was effective in conveying messages to a live audience, and the moral, social and theological questions raised in rhetoricians' plays were a proper onset for debates and formation of opinion.⁷ Another promising line of research involves the interaction between theatre plays and news media, such as pamphlets and newsletters, and the measure in which the representation of recent events is shaped by literary conventions and/or propaganda intentions.⁸ The main issue with studying performances, however, is that the event itself is long gone. If anything, all we have is a written record: the text of a play, or an eyewitness account of the performance. Either way the relation between the written version and the play as it was performed must be treated with caution, for the impact and function of the performance may differ drastically from the impact and function of the text, whether it is a manuscript copy or a printed edition.⁹ Further research is needed on how to use and interpret written and printed records of drama in the study of formation of public opinion.

By discussing a source that represents both manuscript and performance, this article focuses on this more dynamic, multi-layered view of public opinion and on the challenges of method and epistemology

⁴ Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, pp. 63–67; Marotti, *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric*, pp. 75–134; Spaans, 'De pen als wapen?', p. 99.

⁵ On the restricted reach of manuscript texts: Spaans, 'De pen als wapen?', p. 99. On the broad distribution of manuscripts: Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, pp. 148 and 151; Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, pp. 16–19 and 38–41.

⁶ Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*; Waite, *Reformers on Stage*.

⁷ Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille*; Van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten*.

⁸ Groenland, 'Toneel als pamflet', p. 38; Levy, 'Staging the News'.

⁹ Van Bruaene, 'Printing Plays'; Chartier, 'Copied onely by the eare'.

with which students of literary texts are confronted when they set out to study the interaction between literature and public opinion. My aim is to unravel the interplay between fact and fiction, between historical and literary sources in the process of formation of opinion, and to point out the problems encountered in this attempt.

The source under consideration in this article is an incomplete, handwritten description in Dutch of a theatrical performance that took place in Madrid in 1623 before members of the Spanish royal family and Charles, Prince of Wales.¹⁰ Prince Charles (the son of James I of England) had visited Madrid unexpectedly in order to arrange a wedding between himself and the *Infanta* María, the sister of Philip IV, King of Spain. Negotiations about a marriage between an English prince and a Spanish princess had been initiated long before.¹¹ Charles tried to speed things up by travelling incognito to Madrid together with the Duke of Buckingham. Charles's efforts were to no avail, for after months of diplomatic negotiations and royal entertainment, the Prince returned to London without a bride. According to the manuscript account, the subject matter of the play performed before the royal audience was the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. In 1619, the Elector Palatine Frederick V had taken up the position of King of Bohemia, encouraged by rebellious Protestants who conducted a revolt against the Catholic King Ferdinand II. Frederick's royal position only lasted one winter (hence his derisory title 'the Winter King') and came to an end when his army was defeated by the Habsburg army of Ferdinand II in the Battle of White Mountain near Prague in 1620. Frederick and his wife Elizabeth (the daughter of King James I of England) were expelled. They found refuge in the Dutch Republic, the country of his grandfather William of Orange. From 1621 onwards, they resided in The Hague.¹²

The account of the performance in itself is a unique and intriguing document. It was unknown to scholars studying the Spanish Match until now, and new discoveries of sources concerning the match are

¹⁰ The manuscript is preserved in the Regionaal Archief Leiden, The Netherlands, ms. 72422 portefeuille folio.

¹¹ They first involved Prince Henry and the *infanta* Ana, in 1604. When Henry died in 1612, in 1614 new plans were made involving Prince Charles and the *infanta* María. Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 7, 10, 16; Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, p. 18; Pursell, *The Winter King*, p. 55.

¹² Pursell, *The Winter King*.

fairly rare.¹³ Moreover, it is the only source so far that offers a minute description of a play that was witnessed by the Prince of Wales during his visit.¹⁴ But rather than providing any long-awaited answers, the document instead gives rise to a whole host of unanswerable questions on its origin, function and reliability. Most of all, it is debatable whether this is a true description of a real play that was performed during the visit of Prince Charles to Madrid. None of the secondary sources on contemporary Spanish theatre that I consulted in preparation for this article produced any reference to (let alone the full text of) the play that is described in the account.¹⁵ Perhaps there never was a play on the Battle of White Mountain—perhaps the mere idea of playing out this historic confrontation between Frederick and Ferdinand on stage before the eyes of the Prince of Wales during his visit to Madrid was deemed useful for polemic purposes in 1624. Therefore, rather than a problematic opportunity to fill a lacuna in what is known about the Spanish Match, it is its polemic function that makes this newly discovered source valuable and challenging at the same time.

As such, the manuscript account unites two historic events that were the talk of all Europe at that moment. This connection elicits attention. Traditional historiography has it that James I supported the Spanish Match because he was hoping that an English-Spanish bond would help his daughter and son-in-law to regain the lands they had lost to the Habsburg Emperor in 1620.¹⁶ According to this view, when it transpired that the Spanish would never condone such a develop-

¹³ As Glyn Redworth wrote when presenting three unknown letters by James I and the Prince of Wales: 'Comparatively little additional material concerning the Spanish Match has come to light since S.R. Gardiner's compendious investigations in the last century' (Redworth, 'Of Pimps and Princes', p. 401).

¹⁴ Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', p. 76: 'Unfortunately, not one correspondent mentions any play by name, despite regular performances'; Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles', p. 107: 'Unfortunately, it is not clear what specific plays the Prince actually saw, though Don Cruickshank has suggested that Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *Amor, honor y poder* [...] may have been seen by the Prince of Wales'.

¹⁵ Shergold and Varey, 'Some Palace Performances of Seventeenth-Century Plays'; Shergold, *A History of the Spanish stage*; González Gutiérrez, *El Teatro Escolar de los Jesuitas*; Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid'; Ettinghausen, 'The Greatest News Story'; Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles'. I thank Alexander Samson (University College London), Leticia Alvarez Recio (Universidad de Sevilla) and Don Cruickshank (University College Dublin) for confirming that they do not know of any play on the Battle of White Mountain being performed in Madrid in 1623.

¹⁶ Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', pp. 700–01. Also Levy, 'Staging the News', p. 254.

ment, the negotiations for the marriage—which had already been hampered by religious differences—foundered altogether, much to the delight of fervent Protestants in England. Yet this ‘consecrated view of the journey as a way of resolving the issue of the Palatinate’ has been criticized in the recent scholarly debate on the Spanish Match.¹⁷ An English endeavour to reinstate the power of the Bohemian king should no longer be considered as the main reason for this marriage, nor should the Spanish refusal be seen as the main reason for the failure of the match.¹⁸ Prince Charles and his companion, the Duke of Buckingham, merely used the Palatinate as an excuse in retrospect.¹⁹ Putting forward their frustration about not being able to help the Palatinate as the reason for their departure would not only camouflage their failure in bringing the Spanish *Infanta* to England, but also enabled them to claim a ‘new status as religious heroes’.²⁰

The study of this account suggests that even if there was no *causal* relationship between the defeat of Frederick V and the English attempts to secure a marriage between Charles and the *Infanta*, there seems to have been a connection between the two on a *polemic* level. It is this polemic level that will be central to the argument of this paper. The account may or may not offer insight into the propaganda with which the Prince of Wales was confronted during his visit (i.e. the supposed performance). However, it at least serves as a token of the polemics surrounding this event throughout Europe (i.e. the manuscript text). This makes this source an appropriate case for investigating some fundamental problems of the study of the role of literature in the process of the formation of opinion, particularly with regard to the function of the (at least to us) more ephemeral literary culture beyond the realm of the printing press. Instead of trying to find answers to any of the factual questions that the document provokes, in this article I will deal with a question of a more methodological nature: What is the status of this document (and other documents of a similar nature) as a source for understanding the interplay between literature and the early modern public opinion process?

¹⁷ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, pp. 1–2; Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 2–4, 7–8, 10, 16–17, 103, 111, 139; Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, pp. 17–18, 20; Pursell, *The Winter King*, pp. 55, 82; Redworth, ‘Of Pimps and Princes’, pp. 20, 22, 25, 56 and 403–04; Pursell, ‘The End of the Spanish Match’, pp. 714, 724–25.

¹⁹ Pursell, ‘The End of the Spanish Match’, pp. 701, 711–12, 716–17, 720, 722–25; Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 4–5, 89, 92, 106, 123, 130–33, 135–37.

²⁰ Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 138–39.

It goes without saying that even though this document is presented as a contemporary eyewitness account, this does not necessarily mean it is reliable or free from bias. In the first place, it is incomplete, which makes it difficult to interpret the text because essential information might be lacking. In the second place, it is impossible to tell whether this account should be considered as a factual description of a historical event or as a literary representation of an imagined event. Of course, the Battle of White Mountain is a historical event, represented on stage in a literary form, according to the account. But was the performance itself a historical event? As long as the reliability of the account is doubtful, we must consider the possibility that the description in itself is fiction. My final aim, however, is not to dismiss this source as unreliable, nor to find out what really happened in Madrid. I will not use the manuscript account as *the* authoritative source on a performance during Charles's visit, but I will weigh it against other relevant sources: descriptions of the events surrounding the Spanish Match as well as descriptions of early modern theatre performances in general. I will not automatically take it to be a factual account of the events in Madrid in 1623, but I will focus on what people *thought* was happening, or at least, what the reader of this manuscript text was made to think had happened. Firstly, I will describe the form and content of the manuscript text as it is preserved in the Regionaal Archief Leiden. I will then compare the description of this performance to other primary sources concerning the Spanish Match, covering three different types of media: printed pamphlets, theatre plays and manuscript reports of performances. I will focus on the ways in which these sources may have been used to fuel polemical discussions and stir public opinion by mixing fact with fiction and using literary techniques. Finally, I will evaluate what is to be gained from performances and manuscript sources when studying the interplay of literature and public opinion, and what pitfalls accompany this type of research.

THE SOURCE UNDER SCRUTINY: QUESTIONING THE EYEWITNESS

The account of the performance is a handwritten prose text on a folded folio sheet, housed in the Regionaal Archief Leiden.²¹ The

²¹ Regionaal Archief Leiden, ms. 72422 portefeuille folio. See Appendix A for the full text in Dutch and my English translation.

Ill. 1. RA Leiden ms. 72422 portefeuille folio, fol. 1r. With courtesy of the Regionaal Archief Leiden.

Ill. 2. RA Leiden ms. 72422 portefeuille folio, fol. 1v. With courtesy of the Regionaal Archief Leiden.

archive did not keep a record of the manuscript's provenance. It is catalogued with assorted, unrelated material. In the past, it was catalogued together with literary texts from the same period. It is currently catalogued together with other sheets of the same format. In the very brief catalogue description it is wrongly dated around 1600. There is a thread in the central fold, which indicates that at some stage, it may have been bound together with other sheets. Wrinkles and creases in the folio sheet show that it has been folded several times. One of the folds indicates the left margin. Other folds suggest that the sheet was folded into a smaller, more manageable size after it had been written on. In this folded state, the document was exposed to influences from without, as moisture stains and darker parts on the outermost sides (fol. 1 recto and fol. 2 verso) demonstrate. The handwriting is regular and easily legible, although little attention has been paid to spelling and punctuation. Several errors were corrected by the same hand in the course of writing. Some of them indicate that the text may have been copied from another source (dittography, eyeskip). The text ends abruptly after the first letter of a new word, halfway through the verso side of the first leaf. The second leaf is blank on both sides. We will never know what happened to prevent the completion of the text. The scribe may have been interrupted or distracted. Another explanation might be that the original text was cut in pieces to allow different scribes to copy it at the same time. This was a common way for manuscript texts to be multiplied.²² The letter 's', which is now the final one in the manuscript, may have been the final one at the very end of the page of the original text, or it may have functioned as catchword to facilitate the connection to the next part of the text. There is no mention of who wrote or owned this account, nor a date or place to indicate when or where it was written. The original text, title and author of the play are not mentioned either. The account only bears a rather general title indicating the content: 'A play that was performed in Spain in Madrid'. In the first line, the text addresses an unspecified

²² Levy, 'Staging the News', p. 265, refers to a newsletter writer who, upon receiving 'a particularly rare tract' from a friend, 'cut it in pieces and set three of his students to transcribe it in enough copies to satisfy all his curious correspondents'. The copying of separate gatherings by different students to speed up the process of transcription (copying 'a pecia'), is also mentioned by Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, p. 37.

audience: 'You will hear the story of a miraculous farce or comedy that will astonish many people'.²³

In sharp contrast to the lack of information on its origins, the account gives an impressive amount of information on the event it describes. The source tells us exactly how the stage was set up and what was happening on stage, thereby enabling us to obtain a clear impression of the performance as a whole. First of all, the festive occasion is specified: the play was performed when Charles was visiting Madrid in 1624, 'allegedly' in order to arrange a wedding with the Spanish *Infanta*, 'as many people know'. (Of course, the visit took place in 1623—the mistake in the year of the visit might mean that the account was written (or copied) in 1624.) According to the author of this account, many performances were staged for the prince's entertainment, and it was Jesuits who composed this particular play about the Roman Emperor Ferdinand and Frederick, the King of Bohemia. It should be noted that the setting and the choice of subject matter differs greatly from the usual Jesuit theatre, which was written and performed in Latin, functioned mainly within the framework of Jesuit colleges, and mostly dealt with biblical subject matter. Admittedly, Jesuits wrote occasional plays to welcome important persons, and a small number of Jesuit plays in the seventeenth century were based on recent events.²⁴

The content of the play is described in quite some detail. First, the King of Bohemia appears on stage, accompanied by armed soldiers. Then another army enters, preceded by the Emperor Ferdinand. They start to fight, and the 'battle of Prague' is portrayed on stage, including a shooting match with blank cartridges which lasts for half an hour (described as 'pleasant to witness'). There are several moments of suspense and indecision, before a figure called Xaltrax descends from heaven, dressed entirely in white, and helps Ferdinand to win the battle. This is another remarkable detail in the description. It is rather unlikely that the Jesuits would have used a mysterious, almost pagan, character like Xaltrax. He need not have been an entirely fictional invention though. According to historical descriptions of the battle, '[t]he Emperor's side also benefited from the exertions of a Carmelite friar whose ecstatic exhortations may have significantly bolstered

²³ Quotes refer to the Dutch text and the English translation, both in appendix A.

²⁴ González Gutiérrez, *El Teatro Escolar de los Jesuitas*, pp. 212 and 279, p. 206.

Ill. 3. RA Leiden ms. 72422 portefeuille folio, fol. 1r (detail: Xaltrax). With courtesy of the Regionaal Archief Leiden.

morale'.²⁵ Xaltrax may have been modelled after this Carmelite friar, wearing a white cloak. But he would have been a figment of the imagination of the person who wrote the account, rather than a character that the Jesuits would use in their plays.

After the victory onstage, Ferdinand is greeted by rapturous applause. But the story does not end there. An epilogue (described as 'a miraculous farce') has a number of devils throw Frederick into hell through a trapdoor in the lower stage, under which a real fire is burning. Finally, the figure representing Xaltrax (played by a Jesuit, as the author of the account remarks) takes to the stage again and declares in very strong terms that this is the fate of anyone who fights against the Roman Catholic religion. It was common for Jesuit plays to be concluded with an epilogue, resuming the general message of the play.²⁶ The plot in itself, featuring Catholics fighting Protestants and sending them off to hell, was used by Catholic authors on different occasions. Already in 1597, Jesuits in Munich performed a similar play dealing with the battle against heresy, representing three hundred devils who would throw themselves from the scene straight into hell.²⁷ In 1621, the same topic features in a poem in a Dutch news message on the Battle of White Mountain, describing how the Habsburg army, assisted by heavenly powers, chases the Protestant army away, into the 'dark house of Pluto'.²⁸ Jesuits had a good reason to be critical of Frederick of Bohemia. The Bohemian Protestants considered the Jesuits to be the greatest threat to Protestantism and to have far too much influence on Ferdinand.²⁹ In a letter from 1619, Frederick blamed the Jesuits for attempting to bring Bohemia 'totally once again under the Papist yoke and an absolute dominion'.³⁰ As a result, the Jesuits suffered from the Protestant rebellion in the Palatinate more than anyone else and when the Protestants came into power in Bohemia, the Jesuits were expelled and dispossessed, and some of their churches were subjected to iconoclasm and reform.³¹ Obviously, the Jesuits would hold a grudge against Bohemian Protestants and Frederick in particular. On the other hand,

²⁵ Pursell, *The Winter King*, p. 115; Pursell refers to Olivier Chaline, *La Bataille de la Montagne Blanche* (8 Novembre 1620): *Un mystique chez les guerriers* (Paris 2000).

²⁶ González Gutiérrez, *El Teatro Escolar de los Jesuitas*, pp. 220–21.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 271.

²⁸ Sabbe, *Brabant in 't verweer*, p. 78.

²⁹ Pursell, *The Winter King*, pp. 19, 45, 53, 66–68, 75, 85.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 48, 59, 95–96.

it seems that the Jesuits were 'vociferous in their support for the marriage' between Charles and the *Infanta*, since they were positively disposed to the thought of having a Catholic queen in England.³² They would not have jeopardized that opportunity by rubbing Charles up the wrong way.

The account also includes a detailed description of the stage and the gallery. The audience was seated on a high gallery, where a special place was designated for the Spanish royal family, as well as for the Prince of Wales. The prince is described as sitting together with the sister of the king, i.e. the *Infanta* María whom he sought to marry. However, it is not very likely that the Prince of Wales would watch a performance in the open air, seated next to the *Infanta*. When Charles first arrived in Madrid, the prince and princess were not allowed to be in each other's company. Only when Charles had agreed to the Spanish conditions (including full liberty for Catholics in England) were they allowed to see each other in public. Much to the surprise of the Spanish, Charles agreed to the new conditions on 7 July 1623.³³ On the same day Charles wrote a letter to his father, saying that the *Infanta* 'sits publickly with me at the Playes'.³⁴ This would mean that the situation as described in the account of the performance is not impossible, and if the performance were real, that it took place after 7 July 1623. Yet the royal family would watch performances inside the palace, rather than in the open air.

The gallery surrounded a large stage, consisting of two levels, an upper stage and a lower stage. The lower stage featured a trapdoor, which proved to be essential in the play's epilogue. To prevent people from walking underneath the lower stage, carpenters had fitted wooden boards all the way around. The upper stage was as high as some houses in Madrid and could only be reached by taking a rope and jumping onto it. It is hard to tell what purpose this upper stage would have served, as this is where the account abruptly ends. In itself, the technique of the two levels and the trapdoor in the stage construction to create special effects, such as falling and rising, was not new. It had already been introduced in the *autos sacramentales* (moralities or

³² Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 117, 46.

³³ Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', p. 714; Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', pp. 85–86; Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', pp. 63–64; Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 123–24.

³⁴ Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', p. 77.

biblical plays organized by the church) of the sixteenth century.³⁵ It is therefore possible that such a stage would have been used in Madrid in 1623 as well, but this is not confirmed by other sources that describe the stage setting of the plays performed on that occasion.³⁶ As these plays were performed either inside the palace or outside on a wagon-stage (during the entry and the procession), none of these match the two-levelled stage of the play on the Battle of White Mountain. The stage that comes closest to the one described in the Dutch account is the one on the Plaza Mayor, which in a similar way was surrounded by balconies and closed off by carpenters with wooden barriers when a festival took place. The difficulty, however, is the scale and the purpose of the Plaza Mayor, which could host up to 50,000 spectators and was mostly used for bullfights and games, not for theatre performances.³⁷

Detailed as the description of the play may be, it evokes more questions than answers. Bearing in mind that the play was performed in front of Charles, the choice of the subject matter is remarkable to say the least. Throwing Frederick into hell before the very eyes of his brother-in-law almost seems too blunt to be true. If not the Jesuits, who would have been so daring as to stage such subject matter, and with what intention in mind? Who was the author of the play? Who performed it? What was the purpose of this performance? How would it have been received by the English prince and how did the play's reception influence the negotiations for the Match? What member of the audience was responsible for the description of the play, and why did he or she decide to take notes? In what language was the play performed, and in what language was the description written? Who made the manuscript copy of the account and what was the intended audience? Why does it suddenly end in mid sentence? It is well-nigh impossible to answer these questions without ending up in mere speculation, for the account itself offers no clues whatsoever to its origins, goals or reception. To find out who might have written the account of the performance would require a thorough investigation into the members of the English or Spanish royal entourage (diplomats, noble-

³⁵ Alonso Hernández, *Spaanse letterkunde*, pp. 193–94 and 200.

³⁶ Shergold, *A History of the Spanish stage*, pp. 266, 294 and 625 (illustration); Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', pp. 55, 71 and plate 13; Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', pp. 76–77. The engraving is also shown on: <http://www.theatrales.uqam.ca/chronologie/madrid.html> (last consulted on 20 March 2009).

³⁷ Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', p. 60.

men), professional and private news writers that were present, as well as actors and playwrights involved in the entertainment for the Prince. Finding the scribe who made this copy would entail comparing this handwriting to other written material of the period—but where to begin? Searching for possible readers of this manuscript text would be like looking for a needle in a haystack as well. The research is further hampered by the fact that the original text may not have been written in Dutch, but in Spanish or English, and translated into Dutch later on.³⁸ Last but not least, how can we even be sure that this performance took place in reality?

All of this leaves us with a great many riddles. For want of other evidence on the play of the Battle of White Mountain, all we can do is compare this source to other sources bearing on the same event. First of all, I will focus on printed pamphlets and newsletters relating to the Spanish Match. Pamphlets come in different shapes and styles: usually brief, but sometimes bulky, fictional as well as matter-of-fact, satirical as well as serious, in prose as well as in other literary forms (poems, dialogues, fictional letters), with and without illustrations.³⁹ Newsletters developed from personal correspondence into a professionalized trade, which was flourishing around 1620.⁴⁰ In Spain, a particular type of newsletter was known as *relaciones*, which were reports that covered a single event.⁴¹ All of these could circulate in print as well as in manuscript, whether they were copied from a printed version or published in manuscript form straight away.⁴²

As has been pointed out in the introduction to this article, the representation of the course of events in printed sources may differ from the one in manuscript sources. This is why we will now have a closer

³⁸ News travelled throughout Europe in different languages and translations. On the exchange between the Low Countries and England: Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 266–67. On the exchange between Spain and England: Samson, '1623 and the Politics of Translation'.

³⁹ De Kruif, Meijer Drees and Salman, *Het lange leven van het pamflet*; Harline, *Pamphlets, printing and political culture*.

⁴⁰ Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 263–65.

⁴¹ Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen*, p. 24; Ettinghausen, 'The Greatest News Story', p. 76.

⁴² The circulation of news in manuscript form is mentioned in Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, pp. 148 and 151; Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 254 and 264–65; Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, pp. 31–41; Ettinghausen, 'The Greatest News Story', p. 76; Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen*, p. 170; Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 368–70 and 412–13.

look at the printed pamphlets on the Spanish Match, comparing them with the manuscript account.

PRINTED PAMPHLETS ON THE SPANISH MATCH:
DEMONSTRATIONS OF DIPLOMACY

Ettinghausen once called the story of Charles travelling incognito and arriving unannounced in Madrid ‘the scoop of the century’, and even ‘the greatest news story since the resurrection’.⁴³ A large number of pamphlets, newsletters and *relaciones* in manuscript and print covered the visit of the Prince of Wales to Madrid in 1623.⁴⁴ According to Sánchez Cano, thanks to these publications, the festivities organized to entertain the Prince of Wales ‘were played out before the public, not just of the urban populace in Madrid, but also before the wider public sphere’.⁴⁵ They may be considered as ‘textual counterparts’ of the festivities.⁴⁶ The reports offer what seems to be an accurate, day-to-day account of the negotiations and the meetings of the English guests and their Spanish hosts, describing various forms of entertainment, from hunting wolves to a display of armour, visits to Casa del Campo, walks along the river and fireworks, music, dance and theatre performances. However, none of the pamphlets describe the title or content of any of these plays, leaving us empty-handed when it comes to establishing a performance of a play on the Battle of White Mountain.

Instead of discussing the details of the entertainment, the pamphlets and reports focus on the way Charles and Philip IV treated one another in a mutual display of discretion, courtesy and tactics. It has been suggested that the Spanish pamphlets and *relaciones* on the Spanish Match served to glorify the Habsburg monarchy and ‘functioned

⁴³ Ettinghausen, ‘The Greatest News Story’, p. 89.

⁴⁴ English and Spanish printed pamphlets on the Spanish Match can be found online in ‘Renaissance festival books’ from the British Library and in ‘TEMPO: The early modern pamphlets online’. For Dutch printed pamphlets see Knuttel 1978 and the online source *Digitale Atlas Geschiedenis* (DAG). For manuscript copies of Spanish *relaciones* and English verse libels on the Spanish Match, see Ettinghausen, ‘The Greatest News Story’, pp. 78–79 and *Early Stuart Libels*, ‘N. The Spanish Match Crisis, ca. 1618–1623’. Cf. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 350, 388, 397–98 for separate mentions of the Spanish Match.

⁴⁵ Sánchez Cano, ‘Entertainments in Madrid’, pp. 73 and 51.

⁴⁶ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, p. 4.

as religious propaganda for a European-wide Catholic audience'.⁴⁷ In doing so, they apparently chose to demonstrate the moral standards and superiority of the Spanish rather than to seek a hostile confrontation. The pamphlets that describe the events during Charles's stay constantly emphasize the friendly manner in which the prince was treated by the Spanish. As Brennan Pursell writes, 'in ceremony Felipe treated Charles with the utmost honour'.⁴⁸ According to Jeremy Robbins, most Spanish poems on the visit of Charles were similarly amicable in tone, driven by 'a desire not to offend', 'avoiding political comment' and emphasizing 'the friendship and equality between Philip and Charles'.⁴⁹ When Charles witnessed the procession of the penitents on Good Friday, the Count of Olivares, who held a powerful position at the Spanish court and who played an influential role in the wedding negotiations, took care that it would not 'offend the sensibilities of the English, ordering that anything that might cause either hilarity or offence be removed from the floats'.⁵⁰ According to an English pamphlet, Charles was 'continually from time to time exceeding much caressed and esteemed by that King, who delighteth extremely in his company, and greatly honoured by all the Court for his brave and Prince-like Comportments'.⁵¹ A Dutch pamphlet that was translated from the English describes how on one of their first meetings the King embraced the Prince, and gave many demonstrations of his love and affection, as well as of the tight bonds of trust and favour between the King and the Prince.⁵² Apparently, authors on both sides were aiming at a friendly representation of the rapport between the two countries. Such 'display of friendship' would indeed serve as 'a diplomatic tool' in royal circles at that time.⁵³

Of course, the representation of events in the pamphlets does not necessarily imply a true or full account of what happened during Charles's visit to Madrid. It was not uncommon to leave out certain

⁴⁷ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', p. 706.

⁴⁹ Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles', pp. 108 and 112.

⁵⁰ Ettinghausen, 'The Greatest News Story', p. 82. Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 90–91 also mentions a concern not to offend Charles and Buckingham on two occasions, although he also writes that 'the Spaniards onely rarely managed to show any respect for the religion of their guests'.

⁵¹ *A continuation of a former relation* [...], p. 18.

⁵² *Een waerachtich verhael ende journael* [...], fol. A3 recto.

⁵³ Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, p. 27.

details in the reports when they would not serve the ideological purposes of the text, the authors being very well aware of the pamphlets' 'capacity to manipulate and transform public opinion'.⁵⁴ It is known that not all sources were equally diplomatic. The poet Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza, for example, wrote a sonnet on the occasion of Charles kneeling before the monstrance in the Corpus Christi procession (an event that convinced the Spanish of his willingness to convert to Catholicism). In the poet's eyes, this was a greater victory over 'fierce heresy and German error' than Charles V had ever managed to bring about. This poem seems to be an exception, as Jeremy Robbins writes: 'Here we do see a Spaniard forcibly expressing the superiority of Catholicism, something that is unusually partisan in comparison with the majority of poems written on Charles' visit'.⁵⁵ Such negative opinions on 'heresy' may deliberately have been excluded from the pamphlets, which might explain why the contents of the theatre plays are not mentioned in them. Therefore, although the existence of the play on the Battle of White Mountain is not corroborated by printed pamphlets, neither does its absence from them constitute proof that there was never such a play.

It is clear that the representation of events in the printed pamphlets was much more diplomatic than is suggested by the manuscript description of the play on the Battle of White Mountain. But what about the actual plays? Although none of the printed pamphlets describe the theatre plays in detail, a number of the plays that were written especially for the Spanish Match have been preserved. They form part of propaganda campaigns, steered by the governments of both Spain and England. In the next section, I will discuss these plays and compare them to the play on the Battle of White Mountain as it is described in the manuscript account.

THEATRE PLAYS ON THE SPANISH MATCH: SPELLING IT OUT ON STAGE?

When Charles arrived in Madrid in 1623, the Count of Olivares was in the midst of conducting a grand campaign to restore the glory and

⁵⁴ Samson, '1623 and the Politics of Translation', p. 101; see also Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 253–54.

⁵⁵ Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles', p. 113.

reputation of Spain.⁵⁶ His aim was to reform and unify the nation. Following the example of Maravall, Rodríguez Pérez describes the efforts of Olivares in terms of a '*cultura dirigida*', in which power and ideology are combined. By using propaganda, Olivares and his helpers did their utmost to convince the general audience that Spain was highly successful in national and international matters. One of the means employed by Olivares to boost Spain's reputation and self-esteem was theatre. Rodríguez Pérez argues that theatre was an unparalleled medium for shaping public opinion and was used in this period by the King and his entourage, who wanted to fashion a profitable image of Spain by fuelling the audience's belief in 'the high destiny of Spain'.⁵⁷ The court was keen to make use of the talents of playwrights by commissioning plays on various occasions. In 1621, when the war with the Dutch Republic was resumed after the Twelve Years' Truce, a new type of *comedias* was introduced that suited the propagandistic projection of the self, displaying an optimistic and euphoric image. Military confrontations were once again being performed on stage without any restrictions, as they had been at the beginning of the war. Unsurprisingly, the topics of these plays include recent Spanish military victories, as described in accounts that were published soon after the events.⁵⁸ In many plays the enemy is depicted as hostile and despicable.⁵⁹ Some of them include explicit messages in favour of Catholicism.⁶⁰ Interestingly, Rodríguez Pérez points out that the influence of Olivares is discernible in a number of these plays. Evidence that the court approved of the plays' representation of events is also to be found in the paintings at the palace of El Retiro, which depicted scenes from the battles and were inspired by the theatrical performances.⁶¹

Not only did the court use theatre as a propaganda machine to boost the country's confidence, but it also used theatre to steer public opinion on the Spanish Match in particular. There were several plays that dealt with the topic of the Spanish Match itself, which expressed a (negative) opinion on the matter and which were commissioned by noblemen with ties to the court. Most of them were written before or

⁵⁶ Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen*, p. 146.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 149–50.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 180–81.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

after Charles's visit to Madrid, while one was presumably performed before his very eyes. In 1617, when the negotiations regarding a match between Charles and a Spanish princess were well underway, the Duke of Lerma (Olivares's predecessor) commissioned Luis Vélez de Guevara to write *El caballero del sol*. According to Cruickshank, 'the play ends by suggesting that some other princess would be a more appropriate match for the prince, a message that Lerma certainly wanted to communicate'.⁶² Lerma, however, wanted to prevent the English envoy Sir John Digby (who was in Spain to negotiate the marriage) from seeing the play. Cruickshank concludes that '[c]onceivably he felt that the play made this point with insufficient tact'.⁶³ Here we see the same diplomatic consideration that was of a piece with the printed pamphlets—in spite of the critical tone of the play itself. Later theatre plays, however, seem to have bothered less with tact, aiming to get the critical message across unequivocally to the other party. In 1623, Calderón wrote a play called *Amor, honor y poder*.⁶⁴ It was performed in the old royal palace in Madrid on 29 June 1623.⁶⁵ According to Cruickshank this play was commissioned by the court especially for the visit of the English prince, who may have attended this performance.⁶⁶ It is likely that Calderón owed this commission to Olivares, who was related to Calderón's employer.⁶⁷ Calderón's play is set in England in the fourteenth century, and the subject matter is the love between Edward III, King of England, and the daughter of the Earl of Salisbury, while the sister of the English king is courted by a foreign prince. The characters in the play can be easily identified as Prince Charles and the *Infanta*. In this respect, the ending of the play is all too clear: 'the foreign prince who came to pay court to the king's sister, must go home without her'.⁶⁸ The issue of sufficient tact no longer seems to apply; if Charles really did see this play, he would certainly have understood its implications for his position.

This may well have been the intention of the Count of Olivares. Olivares has on more than one occasion been singled out as being

⁶² Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', p. 78.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Alonso Hernández, *Spaanse letterkunde*, p. 196.

⁶⁵ Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', p. 93.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

responsible for ruining the negotiations on purpose.⁶⁹ Samson states that '[i]t was Olivares, working behind the scenes, who was largely responsible for deliberately wrecking the match'.⁷⁰ In 1630, Olivares himself boasted about his accomplishment in this respect.⁷¹ In 1622, Olivares, who had never been in favour of the marriage himself, was asked by Philip IV to find a way to get out of the marriage negotiations, because Philip III had his doubts about the match and asked his son to call it off just before he died.⁷² When Charles suddenly appeared in Madrid in March 1623, Olivares could not just turn the royal guest down. He had to think of something that would put an end to the negotiations while maintaining the friendship with England. In the words of Redworth: '[...] what Olivares had to do over the long summer of 1623 was to find a way to make the Prince of Wales go home of his own accord'.⁷³ Olivares decided to take subtle and diplomatic action. As Pursell puts it, Olivares's moves were 'counterproductive to the match, but they never involved breaching court protocol or sinking to the level of crude threats'.⁷⁴ He simply stalled (and eventually frustrated) the negotiations by asking Rome to set strict conditions before granting the papal dispensation required to seal the marriage. One of the conditions was Charles's conversion to Catholicism—a highly unlikely event.⁷⁵ The theatre plays may have functioned as another way to make Charles leave of his own accord—spelling out on stage what could not be said through official court diplomacy.

In the years after Charles's departure from Madrid, more plays were written looking back on the Spanish Match. According to Samson, '[i]n 1625, royal panegyrists still were explaining away the ruptured Spanish marriage'.⁷⁶ These later plays emphasize the religious objections

⁶⁹ Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', pp. 700–01; Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', p. 51.

⁷⁰ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, p. 2.

⁷¹ Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, p. 103.

⁷² Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', p. 703; Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 56, 67–69, 103; Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', p. 63.

⁷³ Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, p. 99. Also pp. 69 and 105.

⁷⁴ Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', p. 713.

⁷⁵ Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta*, pp. 5, 16–17, 90, 101–02, 105, 107–08; Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles', p. 121; Pursell, 'The End of the Spanish Match', p. 710; Sánchez Cano, 'Entertainments in Madrid', p. 51.

⁷⁶ Samson, *The Spanish Match*, p. 5.

to the marriage, and moreover they reveal the influence of Olivares.⁷⁷ Particularly interesting in this respect is a play written by Francisco de Quevedo, *Cómo ha de ser el privado* (*How the King's Counsellor Should Behave*, 1629). According to Jeremy Robbins, this 'piece of theatrical propaganda' was written in favour of the Count of Olivares.⁷⁸ Quevedo uses a character called Valisero, a clear anagram of Olivares, to voice (in retrospect) a negative opinion of the alliance between a Protestant and a Catholic. In this play, Charles is represented by the Protestant Prince of Denmark, who wants to marry the sister of the Catholic King Fernando of Naples—a marriage that (rather predictably) will not take place, because the Prince refuses to fulfil the Pope's conditions.⁷⁹ These later plays indicate that the very topic of the Spanish Match is used as religious propaganda, even retrospectively. All in all we see that these plays served to convey a message that was contrary to the general tone of the negotiations, by advising against the marriage, mostly because of religious reasons. Moreover, some of the plays were commissioned by the Duke of Lerma and the Count of Olivares, who used these plays to convey their own pessimistic view of a possible marriage between an English prince and a Spanish princess.

As a matter of fact, things were not very different in England, although it took a while before the English court realized that theatre could be used to its advantage instead of considering it as a threat to national unity. To avoid upheaval, Elizabeth and James I had tried to put a stop to theatre plays on recent political and religious events.⁸⁰ The plans for the Spanish Match in particular were considered a topic not to be discussed by the general public. As F.J. Levy puts it:

The nub of the matter was foreign policy and—though the King did not say so—most especially the Spanish marriage proposed for Prince Charles. It was this contentious business that generated "a greater openness, and liberties of discourse, even concerning matters of State, (which are no Theames, or subjects fit for vulgar persons, or common meetings)" than had in former times been permitted; and it was discussion of the marriage that the King wished to suppress.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Cruickshank, 'Calderón's *Amor, honor y poder* and the Prince of Wales', pp. 79 and 95.

⁷⁸ Robbins, 'The Spanish Literary Response to the Visit of Charles', pp. 117–19.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

⁸⁰ Levy, 'Staging the News', p. 255.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 252.

Although there were plays celebrating victories of the English, it was forbidden to ‘perform any modern histories nor speak of contemporary affairs’.⁸² Yet it was the issue of the Palatinate that made the court realize it might be ‘expedient to allow a wider scope to the dissemination of news’.⁸³ Levy connects the shift of power in the last years of James’s reign to changes in the court’s attitude towards news and drama.⁸⁴ Things changed definitively after Charles had returned from Madrid:

By 1624, when Prince Charles and the duke of Buckingham were trying to drum up popular enthusiasm against Spain, the ban on discussing “causes of State, and secrets of Empire” made little sense, and efforts to reimpose it later proved futile. Instead, the “government” took pains to shape the news that was available, by censorship if necessary, by issuing its own version of events when possible.⁸⁵

After Charles had returned to England a ‘prolonged English anti-festival’ was held as a response to ‘the Spanish festival in Madrid which had welcomed Charles the year before’.⁸⁶ It involved a series of celebrations and performances expressing anti-Spanish sentiments, starting with the welcoming ceremonies on the Prince’s return and ending ten months later with the performance of Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*. Remarkably, this play is specifically criticizing the Jesuits. Middleton in fact was inspired by anti-Catholic pamphlets when he wrote his play.⁸⁷ In Middleton’s play, the stage is a chess board; the white pieces represent the English and the black pieces stand for the Spaniards who were involved in the marriage negotiations in Madrid. The Jesuits are exposed as being evil instruments in the hands of the Spanish government. In the first scene, the ghost of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, appears together with his servant, called Error. The servant tells of a dream he had about a fight between the white pieces (the Spaniards) and the black pieces (the English) in a game of chess. The game (consisting of a variety of intrigues surrounding the Spanish Match) is then enacted by the other characters in the play, representing Charles, Philip, Gondomar, Olivares, Buckingham, a Jesuit bishop and

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 259–60.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ Levy, ‘Staging the News’, p. 275.

⁸⁶ Darby, ‘The Black Knight’s Festival Book’, p. 184.

⁸⁷ Levy, ‘Staging the News’, p. 262.

the other people involved. In the final scene, all of the black pieces are put one by one in a bag that represents hell.⁸⁸ It appears that the plot of a battle between Catholics and Protestants, where the opponent is thrown into hell at the end, was popular not just among authors on the Catholic side. Various responses to the play have survived. An English member of the audience, Sir John Holles, described the play in a letter to a friend, pointing out the moral of the play as well as describing the stage.⁸⁹ According to Holles, the play demonstrated ‘the popular opinion, that the Jesuits mark is to bring all the Christian world under Rome for the spirituality, & under Spayn for the temporal[i]ty’.⁹⁰ Both the Spanish ambassador in London, Carlos Coloma, and the King of England reacted with indignation to this play. In August 1624, Coloma described Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* in a letter to the Count of Olivares.⁹¹ He considered the performance an insult to the Spanish. King James was ‘furious’ as well: ‘He remembered well “there was a commaundment and restraint giuen against the representinge of anie modern Christian kings in those Stage-plays [...]”’.⁹² Nevertheless, in order to perform the play for ten consecutive days, the author and actors must have enjoyed Court protection. This is why a number of scholars believe that *A Game at Chess* was probably part of a programme of anti-Spanish propaganda which was supported by the Prince of Wales. The person responsible may even have been the Duke of Buckingham himself.⁹³ In that case, he would have used theatre in pretty much the same way as Olivares did, which was to stir public opinion in favour of their own point of view.

All in all, the play on the Battle of White Mountain as described in the Dutch manuscript account differs from the plays that were commissioned by the Spanish court. These Spanish plays choose a mythological or historical setting to discuss the problematic issues involved in the Match. In spite of these attempts to dissimulate a direct attack on the English, the true intention of these plays would have been all too clear for anyone who watched them. On the other hand, the play on the Battle of White Mountain does have a number of elements in

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

⁸⁹ Braunmuller, ‘“To the Globe I rowed”’; Howard-Hill, ‘The unique eye-witness report of Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*’; Levy, ‘Staging the News’, p. 261.

⁹⁰ Braunmuller, ‘“To the Globe I rowed”’, p. 342; Howard-Hill, ‘The unique eye-witness report of Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*’.

⁹¹ Darby, ‘The Black Knight’s Festival Book’, p. 174.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pp. 261–62.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 262; Darby, ‘The Black Knight’s Festival Book’, p. 177.

common with the English response, *A Game at Chess* by Middleton. In both, we find a battle between Catholics and Protestants, with hell as the final destination of the opponent, and with a strong emphasis on the intentions of the Jesuits (albeit from a positive and from a negative viewpoint respectively). It is possible that the description of the play of the Battle of White Mountain fits in with anti-Spanish propaganda from the side of the English, rather than with the Spanish theatrical tradition. This assumption is reinforced by other evidence, which is a satirical English verse description of a Spanish play. This poem will be discussed in more detail in the next section, which deals with written accounts of theatre performances and their part in polemic discussions.

WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF THEATRE PERFORMANCES: PLAYING AT POLEMICS?

Although eyewitness accounts of theatre performances are fairly rare, the account of the play of the Battle of White Mountain is not the only one to survive. Members of the audience were known to take notes during the performance, or to write an account of a play down from memory afterwards.⁹⁴ Some of these reports were intended for private use only (in personal correspondence, diaries or manuscript miscellanies); others would serve a more professional purpose, such as the letters that were written following the performance of *A Game at Chess* discussed in the previous section: Holles wrote a more private, informal account, while the ambassador's letter can be considered as an official report, serving international matters.⁹⁵ Other descriptions of theatrical performances would start circulating as pamphlets in manuscript and print. One might say that, while theatre plays were 'staging the news', as F.J. Levy calls it, these written and printed descriptions of performances were turning what happened onstage into news again.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, pp. 141 and 149–50; Chartier, 'Copied onely by the eare'; Bouza, *Corre manuscrito*, pp. 40–43. There is a Dutch rhetorician's play featuring 'spies' taking notes during the performance of the play (Moser, *De strijd voor rhetorica*, p. 53).

⁹⁵ Levy, 'Staging the News', p. 263; Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, p. 166.

⁹⁶ Levy points to the close link between 'news, newspapers and topical drama' (Levy, 'Staging the News', p. 254) and calls the play *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* a 'news play' and a 'staged newsbook' (Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 257 and 259).

Or rather, what is *suggested* as having happened onstage, for these pamphlets do not necessarily refer to real performances. Some descriptions of dramatic performances seem to have served as a vehicle to express a view on actual matters—whether or not the play was actually performed. I will illustrate this by discussing three examples, the first of which is related to the Spanish Match.

There is an English verse libel in manuscript entitled ‘On a Shew presented before Prince Charles in the Spanish Courte’.⁹⁷ As the title indicates, the poem describes a play that was performed on the same occasion as the play on the Battle of White Mountain: the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1623. The poem begins:

The Prince of Wales with all his royall traine
Was entertained in the Courte of Spaine:
The Catholikes theire respects disclose
Delighting him with Feasts, & Maskes, & Shewes.

The poem describes how the Spaniards were entertaining the Prince of Wales while the Pope was lying ill. When he died, the Spanish planned to honour him before the Prince of Wales, with ‘antike shewes and tricks’. One play in particular is described, about a fight between Catholics and Protestants. This play is performed on a two-tiered stage, just like the play on the Battle of White Mountain:

Within the Stage heav’n placed is on high
Opposd to which hells dreadfull gulfe doth lie.

The Catholics who die in the fight, are transported straight into heaven, while the Protestants (‘Poore Puritanes’) are thrown in hell by thousands of devils. When the Pope himself dies, he is carried up to ‘heaven’ as well, by a rope:

Amongst the rest the Holy Father dies,
As soon he must be mounted to the skies.
And that they may the more advance the Pope
They wind him into heaven with a Rope

But just when he reaches the upper stage, the rope breaks and the Pope falls down, straight into the lower compartment of the stage:

⁹⁷ *Early Stuart Libels*, Nv14 (http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/spanish_match_section/Nv14.html). Bellany and McRae edited the text according to Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.97, pp. 167–68; another manuscript copy has been preserved in BL MS Sloane 542, fol. 37r.

All watch his Entrance; But I feare to tell!
The Rope breaks! The Pope falls into hell!

Thus, the head of the Catholic Church ends up in hell, along with the Protestants. The author of the poem mockingly comforts the Catholics by assuring them that the Pope has merely entered purgatory and will surely reach heaven in the end. He then makes fun of the breaking of the rope, commenting that the other actors should have carried the Pope on their backs. He suggests that the accident was due to the heavy drinking that the actors had been doing. The weight of the Pope is explained first by his many virtues, then by his abundant lifestyle, then by the attributes he holds and finally by his guilty conscience:

Where lay the fault? what did the man deceive thee?
Or did hee not foresee the Pope was heavie?
Methinks thou shouldst have considred that
His greate revenues needs must make him fatt.
Besides perhaps he carried up about him

Copes, Miters, Crosses, pixes, roodes without him.
Doubtles within there was wondrous weight;
His Heart & Conscience was not very light.
And drawing upward such a heavie Pope
How could it be but he must breake the Rope?

The author concludes that the rope just had to break, carrying such a heavy Pope, and that thanks to a weak rope, the Pope has ended up where he belongs:

Since this it stands that heaven did deceive him,
And that small Rope of such great Joyes bereave him;
Yett Hell was ready alwaies to receive him,
There was he found att first & there I leave him.

According to the modern editors of the verse libel, the description of the play and the falling of the Pope might be fictional and not refer to a real performance. They write:

This lumbering exercise in anti-Catholic wit does not seem to have been occasioned by any actual mishap at a show staged for Prince Charles in Madrid. Rather, the poem attempts to make some mild polemical capital out of the death of Pope Gregory XV in the summer of 1623.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Bellany and McRae in their introduction to *Early Stuart Libels*, Nv14 (http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/spanish_match_section/Nv14.html).

This would mean that the subject matter on its own would serve as an instrument in opinion forming, regardless of a real performance. This is not the only occasion where a description of a theatre performance seems to have been used to stir up a polemic. There are two other examples that I would like to discuss: a printed pamphlet in Dutch describing a play that was performed at the Spanish Court in 1588, and a series of poems on a performance by the Antwerp rhetoricians in 1631.

The 1588 pamphlet was printed in Utrecht on the basis of a London 'Copy', as the title page states. The title translates as follows: 'A true declaration of a miraculous farce that was performed at the Court of the King of Spain and is full of events, written to serve as a warning to all, not to suffer the same force and slavery like you will find explained here'.⁹⁹ Like the manuscript account of the play on the Battle of White Mountain, this too is a description in Dutch of a play that was performed at the Spanish Court, be it a few decades earlier. The author starts describing the performance without any further ado. On the stage, there is a pedlar, together with three sovereigns: the king of Spain, the king of France, and the king of Sweden. They ask the pedlar what he has got on offer, and he replies that he is selling Holland, Zeeland and Friesland. The Spanish king refuses to buy what is already his. The French king is not interested in the merchandise. The Swedish king does fancy the lands, but he is afraid they might already belong to someone else. The pedlar assures him this is not the case. They used to belong to the king of Spain, he says, but they no longer accept him as their sovereign. When the pedlar gives the reasons for their renouncing the Spanish king, describing the situation in the Low Countries and giving a favourable image of the Prince of Orange, the king of France asks who he might be. The pedlar says his name is well known: he is 'the state of the nation without council'. The French king immediately drags the pedlar to the king of Spain, in order to make him account for himself. The pedlar must hand over his merchandise, and all actors briefly retreat behind a curtain. When the pedlar appears again, he wears a velvet cloak and a beautiful hat, and he holds a paper saying 'This is the state of the nation without council'. The others make him kneel on a cushion, and the pedlar is beheaded with a sword (the author mentions the use of cow's blood in

⁹⁹ *Een warachtighe verclaringhe van een wonderlijck Batement-spel [...]*.

the process). At the same time, other martyrs are shown to be hung or burnt on the stage, while Holland, Zeeland and Friesland are pillaged by soldiers and finally ripped apart and thrown to the floor. There is no doubt about the objective of this pamphlet. The title page clearly states that it is meant as a warning to prevent people from being forced into such slavery as is described in the text. The description of the play is followed by a short poem about Babylon, saying that it should be shunned because of its wickedness. Moreover, there is a separate 'conclusion' at the end of the pamphlet, saying that this play shows how the King of Spain is planning to maltreat the Low Countries, and expressing the hope that Elizabeth, Queen of England, will fight the King of Spain with the help of God. The detailed description of the performance and the props make it seem plausible that this description is based on a real performance, but as with the play on the Battle of White Mountain, this is the only source referring to the play. The original text has not been preserved. It is interesting that the 'copy' of this pamphlet originated in London. Once more, this indicates traffic of pamphlets between England and the Netherlands.¹⁰⁰

The third and final example of a polemic description of a play involves the Antwerp rhetoricians. In 1631 the Dutch poet Jan van der Veen published a poem criticizing a play that allegedly was performed by the rhetoricians in Antwerp.¹⁰¹ According to the poem, the actors brought an image or statue of Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, onto the stage, representing him 'slain as a dead man'. After some contemplation of the figure, a doctor entered the scene, and started to dissect the body in search for the heart of the deceased. In the end, the heart was located behind his heel, which was considered as a sign of his lack of courage. Not only is the text of this play just as irretrievable as the text of the play on the Battle of White Mountain, but also the Antwerp rhetoricians strongly denied ever having performed such a play. Several of them wrote poems in reply to Van der Veen's accusations, declaring that they would never insult a prince in this manner. They call Van der Veen a liar, who has invented the play all by himself, stealing subject matter from other sources. Van der Veen in turn wrote another poem, saying he is no liar, but that he merely put into words a play that was performed in secret, not publicly. He refers to a

¹⁰⁰ Levy, 'Staging the News', pp. 266–67.

¹⁰¹ Sabbe, *Brabant in 't verweer*, pp. 173–83.

similar play that was performed in Cologne, dealing with the demise of Frederick of Bohemia and his wife, depicting them as beggars.¹⁰² This was just as real and as demeaning a play as the Antwerp one, according to Van der Veen. Again, the Antwerp rhetoricians deny having ever performed the play, and once more, Van der Veen writes another poem accusing them. It remains unclear whether the performance by the Antwerp rhetoricians took place or not. But even without answering this question, it has been suggested that Van der Veen's intention to write the original poem might have been to incriminate the rhetoricians from the Catholic south and to stir public opinion in favour of Calvinism.¹⁰³

The three descriptions of performances that have been discussed in this section all voice a clear and critical view on the performance that is described, which makes it plausible that they were written with the intention of influencing public opinion. What is more, all three of them criticize Catholics from a Protestant point of view. They all describe performances of a play that deals with current affairs. Another thing they have in common is that they present a form of *ekphrasis*: they very vividly express in words what the audience would have seen on the stage, spiced up with particular details: the dissection of the body of Frederick Henry in the play described by Jan van der Veen, the cow's blood in the play on the pedlar selling the Low Countries, the breaking of the rope in the play on the Pope. Even if the performances that they describe were completely made up, ample effort has been made to render the accounts convincingly realistic.

It seems plausible that the description of the play on the Battle of White Mountain had a status similar to the three descriptions discussed in this section. It only differs from the other three in that it does not give an explicit opinion or view on the subject matter of the play. Since the account remained unfinished, we will never know if the author or scribe intended to include an explanatory conclusion, like the one in the Dutch pamphlet of 1588. Nevertheless, what the account of the play on the Battle of White Mountain has in common with the other descriptions discussed here, is the fact that it represents a play on current affairs and the vividness and detail of the description. In addition to that, three out of the four performances discussed were

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 180.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

situated at the Spanish Court. Moreover, there are remarkable similarities between the play on the Battle of White Mountain as described in the Dutch manuscript prose account, and the play on the death of the Pope as described in the English manuscript verse libel. Both texts deal with a performance that took place before Prince Charles during his visit to Madrid. Both describe the same type of play on similar subject matter, using an identical stage setting and theatrical effects: a battle between Catholics and Protestants on a two-tiered stage representing heaven and hell. In both plays, hell is the final destination of the Protestants and in both descriptions the higher stage is reached with a rope. These similarities may be more than a mere coincidence. They either suggest that such plays were indeed performed at the Spanish Court, or they suggest that this kind of imagery was used by anti-Spanish polemic authors, who would be 'staging' similar performances to make the Spanish look bad.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to investigate the status of manuscripts and performances in the interplay of literature and public opinion. It focussed on one source in particular, which was a manuscript description of a performance that allegedly took place in Madrid in 1623 during the visit of the Prince of Wales. It turned out to be impossible to give a conclusive answer when it comes to the reliability of the Dutch account of the Jesuit play on the Battle of White Mountain, since the performance is not mentioned in any pamphlets, *relaciones* or newsletters on the Spanish Match. Should it be a true account of a real performance, then it would provide a completely new view of the entertainment offered to Prince Charles. On the other hand, if it should be considered as a fictional representation of a performance (which seems more likely), this text points to new directions for further research, taking into account a new genre of fictional performances written for polemic purposes and distributed in pamphlets in manuscript and print.

I started out by taking the first option into consideration. The overall lack of evidence of the play to corroborate the account itself—no references, no written or printed versions—fuels the suspicion that the play was never a part of the entertainment presented to the Prince of Wales. It is quite unlikely that Jesuits would have performed a play on the Battle of White Mountain featuring a character like Xaltrax on a

two-levelled stage in front of Prince Charles and the Spanish *Infanta* in Madrid in 1623. The harsh tone and message of the play as it is described in the manuscript account represent a drastic departure from the general description of the courteous entertainment offered to the English prince in the printed pamphlets, which intended to represent first and foremost the friendly relations between the King of Spain and the Prince of Wales. The play is also very different from the Spanish plays that were written on the Spanish Match, which voice negative views on the marriage by representing other fatal marriage plans. At the same time, however, the cruel rejection of the Elector Palatinate on stage does seem to indicate a level of provocation that is part of other Catholic literature written for propaganda reasons. The account contains a number of elements that suggest that the play fits in with the characteristics of the new type of *comedia* that was part of Spain's campaign to boost the Spanish self-esteem: the onstage battle, the representation of recent military victories, the negative depiction of the enemy and the exhortation to defend the Catholic religion. But this hostile stance is not exclusive to Spanish theatre. There are also a number of similarities between the play as described in the manuscript account and the English play *A Game at Chess* that Middleton wrote as part of an anti-Spanish campaign started by Charles when he returned from Madrid: the battle between Catholics and Protestants, hell as the final destination of the enemy, and the message that the Jesuits wish to eradicate all who do not adhere to the Catholic church. This might indicate that this text does not necessarily fit in with Spanish literary tradition, but rather with a polemic tradition on the English side, drawing on the same type of plot and imagery.

This leads to the second option, considering the text as a fictional account, written for polemic reasons. The document may be seen as a manuscript pamphlet (whether it be an unfinished copy of an existing text, or a draft version of a new text), in which a vivid description of a drama experience is used to voice an opinion on a current affair—'staging' a performance for polemic ends, so to speak. There have been other pamphlets and verse libels that use the same technique, three of which were discussed in this article. All were written from a Protestant point of view. One of the three theatre descriptions discussed, representing the death and ascension of the Pope, was related to the Spanish Match as well. It shared certain characteristics with the description of the play on the Battle of White Mountain: both repre-

sent a battle between Protestants and Catholics on the two-tiered stage with a rope leading to heaven and a trapdoor towards hell. Again, this kind of imagery seems to be representative of an English anti-Catholic polemic discourse.

All of the above, however, is just a matter of speculation. If little to nothing can be proven about the origins, function and impact of the manuscript account nor of the presumed performance, what is the use of this document in terms of investigating the relation between literature and public opinion? It invites us not to trust the eyewitness. It forces us to use circumstantial evidence provided by historical as well as literary sources. It urges us to think beyond print and take into account manuscript and performance as well, on a more substantial basis. Further research is needed to be able to compare this source to other descriptions of performances. By following the traces of the formation of opinion in sources like these, we may in the end achieve a fuller and better understanding of the interplay between literature and public opinion. If anything, this flimsy, mottled piece of paper has demonstrated just how rich, complex and multilayered this relation can be.

Websites

- *British library: Renaissance festival books*
(<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/festivalbooks/homepage.html>)
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(<http://www.digitaleatlasgeschiedenis.nl/>)
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(<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/>)
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(<http://tempo.idcpublishers.info/>)
- *Théâtrales*, ed. André G. Bourassa
(<http://www.theatrales.uqam.ca/chronologie/madrid.html>)

Rariora

- *A continuation of a former relation concerning the entertainment given to the Prince His Highnesse by the King of Spaine in his Court at Madrid.* London. Printed by John Haviland for William Barret. 1623. [Early English Books Online; <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>]

- *Een batement spel dat in Spaengien binnen madril gespeelt is.*
[Regionaal Archief Leiden ms. 72422 portefeuille folio]
- *Een waerachtich verhael ende iovrnael van de maniere van de aenkomste des Hoogen ende machtigen princes Caerle, Prince van Groot Britannien, inde Stadt van Madril, ende van 't magnifijck onthael by den koninck van Spanien aldaer te Hove aengedaen.* In 'sGravenhaghe. By Aert Meuris Boeckverkooper inder Papestraet, in den Bybel. Anno 1623.
[Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag pfl 3409]
- *Een warachtighe verclaringhe van een wonderlijck Batement-spel, dat ghespeelt is int Hof vanden Coninc van Spaengien, ende is seer avontuerlick om lesen, tsamen gestelt tot een waerschouwinghe voor alle Menschen, om niet te comen tot sulc-dwanck ende slavernije, ghelijck U.L. hier verclaert sult vinden.* Ghedruckt tot Utrecht na de Copije van Londen. An. 1588.
[Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden THYSPF 751]

APPENDIX A: EEN BATEMENT SPEL DAT IN SPANGIEN / BINNEN
MADRIL GESPEELT IS¹⁰⁴

[fol. 1 recto]

Tot verwonderinge van vele menschen sal ul / verklaert worden van een/ mirakuluesse klucht/ ofte coomedie welcke gespeelt is in Spangien ‘<+tot>’ madril/ alwaer de coninck tegenwoordick syn hoff is houdende oock soo syn veele kenbaer dat den prins van wallees soone vanden coninck van Engellant Jnt Jaer 1624 als daer binnen madril gearriveert is geweest ende aldaer gecoomen was soomen seyden om te trouwen den cooninck van Spangien suster / hier door worden in Spangien veel verscheyde spelle ende coomedien aengerecht om den prins van wales te vermaecken ende synen geest te verhuegen soo ist gebuert dat die jesuyten gecomponeert hadden een coomedij spel van den roomschen keyser ferdunandus ende van frederikus cooninck van bohemien dus waren daer gemaect groet hooge stellatie daer alle eedelen van heeren en vrouwen op saten om het spel te beschouwen oock was daer <-oock> herelycken stoel bereyt daer den prins van walles met coninx suster ende den cooninck ende cooninginne met grooter heerlyckheyt in saeten soo was daer beneeve int midde vande stalasie gemaect een groote toonel daermen die coomedie op speelde als nu de personagie al gereet ware om te speelen soo quam daer eerst een op de toneel in een coonincklycke kleet hy quam met veel kryx volck alles inde wapenen dit was quansuys de cooninck van boheeme die te velde quam om tegen den roomschen keyser te stryden ende als deese met eene groote macht van soldaten op de tooneel stont soo quam daer een andere party haer oversten hadden op synnen hoeft een kroon als een roomschen keyser dus quamense tegen malcanderen in batalye den keyser moste eerst een weynich wycken ende hadt den slach bycans verlooren do<-o>en quam byden Ceyser een met witte cleere dat was <-xxxxx> ‘<+xaltrax>’ eenen geest die uijt den heemel quam tot den keyser gesonden was om hem te troosten en te hulpen de oude Cotolycken leeren te beschermen en voorte staen doe dese geest was bij den Keijser altoos inden strydt ende tot drie ofte vier batalie hadt die keyser de over hant int leste geschieden aen weeder syden een groote slach dat

¹⁰⁴ The original manuscript is in the Gemeentearchief Leiden (The Netherlands), ms. 72422 portefeuille folio.

was soo veel te seggen die slach van pragh dat stryden was seer genuch-
gelyck om te si<-j>en want sy schooten al met loos kruijt..

[fol. 1 verso]

Tegen malcanderen / ende schermutseerden wel een half uijre Eynde-
lyck wast gemaectt dat den kooninck van boohemen het velt rumen
mosten ende dat door de witte geest die den keyser te hulpe gecoomen
was sonder dat den keyser het velt selfs hadt moeten ruymen als dese
batalye en schermutsingen alles gedaen was werden den keyser groote
eer aen gedaen maer hier na geschieden een wonderlyck klucht want
daer waren twee tooneelen <-onder> boven malkanderen onder de
leste tooneel werden veel vier gestooct van hout swavel en peck dat
was soo veel te seggen als die hel die waren romtomme met plancken
toegespickert datmen daer niet onder duer mochten <-loopen> loopen
ende int midde van d<+i>e onderste tooneel was een groote luyck
val gemaectt dat werden open gedaen daer quam eene groote vlam
vier uijt dat was soo veel als die hel ende daer werden de kooninck
van bohemen in geworpen van gemaecte duyvels omme dat hy tege
de oude roomsch katolycke leere hadt op gestaen ende omme ende
omme [sic] dat hy met de ketters te velden gecoomen was doen quam
de geest met witte kleeren die den keyser geholpen hadden twelcken
een Jesuwyt was die deden op het tooneel een reeden en sprack met
luyder stemmen alsoo sullense <+alle> inde afgront der hellen gewor-
pen worden die niet oprecht en geloove aen onse oude roomeynsche
leere booven het tooneel daer de geest op stont was noch een tooneel
<-gemaectt> dat was op vier masten gemaec soo hoogh als eenige huy-
sen dat binnen madril wesen mach daer en kondemen niet op coomen
oftemen mosten daer met een tou op s[pringen].

A PLAY THAT WAS PERFORMED IN SPAIN IN MADRID¹⁰⁵

You will hear a story that will astonish many people, of a miracu-
lous farce or comedy that was performed in Spain in Madrid, where
the king resides nowadays. Many people know well enough that the
Prince of Wales, son of the King of England had come to Madrid in

¹⁰⁵ Translation my own, NM.

the year 1624 with the intention of—as was told—marrying the sister of the king of Spain. On this occasion many plays and comedies were performed in Spain for the entertainment and joy of the Prince of Wales.

It so happened that the Jesuits had written a comedy on the Roman Emperor Ferdinand and Frederick, the King of Bohemia. A large and high gallery was made where all noble men and women were seated to watch the play. There was also a royal seat where the Prince of Wales together with the sister of the King and the King and Queen were seated in beautiful attire. Furthermore, in the middle of the gallery, a large stage was made where the play was performed.

When all actors were ready to play, the first one to enter the stage was dressed in a royal outfit, accompanied by many armed soldiers. He represented the King of Bohemia, who was preparing to fight the Roman Emperor. When he stood onstage with a large number of soldiers, another group entered the stage. On his head, the leader wore a crown like a Roman emperor. Thus they engaged in a fight. At first, the emperor had to give in a little and he nearly lost the battle. Then a person dressed in white joined the emperor; this was Xaltrax, a spirit from heaven. He was sent to the emperor in order to comfort him and help him protect and defend the old Catholic doctrine. When this spirit was with the emperor, he fought constantly and after three or four battles the emperor had the upper hand. Finally a heavy battle was fought on both sides, namely the Battle of Prague. The fighting offered a very entertaining spectacle, because they all shot with blank cartridges and fought for about half an hour. At last they succeeded in forcing the King of Bohemia to leave the field, thanks to the spirit that had come to help the emperor, without the emperor having to give in. When this battle and all the fighting had ended, the emperor was honoured abundantly.

But after this a miraculous farce took place. You need to know that there were two stages on top of each other. Under the lowest stage a large fire was made of wood, sulphur and pitch. This was supposed to represent hell. All around, this stage was nailed up with wooden boards to prevent people from walking underneath. In the middle of the lower stage a large trapdoor was made. It was opened and a large flame came out of it; this was hell. The King of Bohemia was thrown in there by pretend devils for having risen up against the old Roman-Catholic doctrine and for having joined forces with the heretics. Then

the spirit in white, who had been helping the emperor, made his entrance. He was a Jesuit who delivered a monologue on stage, saying in a loud voice: 'In this manner all who do not sincerely believe in our old Roman doctrine will be thrown into the precipice of hell'.

Above the stage where the spirit stood was another stage, made on four poles as high as some houses in Madrid. No one could enter there but by taking a rope and j[umping].