

## *Commentary*

### François de Callières and the Literary/Rhetorical Dimensions of Diplomacy

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**F**rançois Callières today is best remembered as a diplomatist for Louis XIV—the man who conducted deliberations leading to the Treaty of Ryswick (1697)<sup>1</sup>—and author of the classic treatise, *De la Maniere de Negociier avec les Souverains*<sup>2</sup>—described by Harold Nicolson “as the best manual of diplomatic method ever written.”<sup>3</sup> Less is known, however, about Callières’ other literary activities: his succinct contribution to the famous contemporary strife between the “Ancients” and “Moderns,” his panegyric on the king, which won him admission to the French academy, and an assortment of other polished works—what we might call courtesy books—that helped shape the courtly ideals and conventions of *Louisquatorzien* France. Though offering a both witty and sophisticated treatment of such timeless themes as morality, knowledge, beauty, education and love these works did more than that: permeating them was also a serious political purpose—to illustrate the connections between literary form, in its many-sidedness, and the communicative dimension of the diplomatic art. The aim of the present communication is to explore, briefly, some of the key aspects of this connection, to show what it reveals about Callières’ maturing vision of sound diplomatic method and, hopefully, to stimulate a debate about the role of literary discourse in the distinctive orchestration of diplomacy.

Already in his *Panégyrique historique du Roi*<sup>4</sup> published in 1688—that is, before he became a diplomat—Callières recognized that sound diplomacy adopts the norms and conventions of the system it represents, in this case *Ancien Régime* France at its height of political if not cultural prestige. To the degree that Callières personalized this in his eulogy, so he transposed it to the practical—and later, theoretical realm—by emphasizing the importance of compositional style and refinement for the diplomatic art.<sup>5</sup> Diplomacy, as Callières appreciated—was ultimately a

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<sup>1</sup> cf K. W. Schweizer, *François de Callières (1645-1717): Diplomat and Man of Letters* (Lewiston, 1995) chs. 1-11

<sup>2</sup> Published in 1716. For the standard modern English edition see: M. Keens-Soper and K. W. Schweizer (eds.) *The Art of Diplomacy* (New York, 1983), paperback reprint 1994 (University Press of America). A new French edition, edited by Alain Lempereur appeared in 2002 (Librairie Droz, Genève). See also A.F. Whyte, ed. *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes* (Notre Dame, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> H. Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method* (London, 1954) p. 62. cf E. Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (London, 1917), I, p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Paris: P. Auboin, 1688. For a handwritten presentation copy see: Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. f. Fr. 2293. “Panegyrics” were highly popular at this time, almost a form of “cottage industry.” cf M. Fumaroli, *The Poet and the King: Jean La Fontaine and His Century* (Notre Dame, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> cf M. Keens Soper and K. W. Schweizer eds., *The Art of Diplomacy* (New York, 1983) pp. 91-96; Jules Cambon, *Trois siècles de l’academie Française 1635-1935* (Paris, 1935), pp. 301-302.

written rather than a verbal process; hence, in order to avoid misconceptions and ensuing resentments, accuracy in communication is absolutely vital. Political perception and literary expression are symbiotically related, combining elements at once descriptive and analytical from which important insights into the essential principles of effective negotiation can be distilled. Diplomacy is the moderating institution of international politics, working by means of sophisticated communication to accommodate conflicting interests, and in this process literary craftsmanship, combining grace and precision, is a distinctive advantage.<sup>6</sup>

The same theme also reverberates throughout Callières’ learned contribution to the celebrated literary skirmish between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” then at its height, a controversy involving some of France’s leading authors.<sup>7</sup> Dating from around 1670, the above dispute had by this time divided the literary world into two factions: the *anciens* who maintained that the writings of classical antiquity were models of timeless excellence, initiated but never equaled or surpassed; the *modernes* who likewise praised the classical spirit, but insisted that human history, knowledge and morality, had shown undeniable progress and improvement since the days of Rome. The classics, they contended, were not infallible repositories of eternal truths but should be carefully tested in the light of experience and common sense.<sup>8</sup> Their perspective not only highlighted the growing interpenetration of philosophy and the natural sciences by the early 1600s; it also reflected in literary terms how the changing intellectual environment shaped by the Scientific Revolution challenged historically rooted notions of precedent and authority, as well as human progress. Callières, by contrast, sided consistently with the *anciens* and his contribution to the fray entitled Histoire Poétique de la guerre nouvellement déclarée entre les anciens et les modernes won widespread critical acclaim for its wit, imagination and conciliatory tone. The work also placed renewed stress—foreshadowing his Art of Diplomacy—on the importance of stylistic precision in the composition of diplomatic instructions, dispatches and other related *communiqués*. This was further refined in a series of works on current idioms of speech and writing techniques, appearing between 1690 and 1693—interesting for the accuracy with which Callières portrayed contemporary modes of expression and their connection with social etiquette and effectiveness in office.<sup>9</sup> The first, entitled “Des mots à la mode et des nouvelles façon de parler,”<sup>10</sup> was sold out within the month and two revised editions swiftly followed. Displaying a developed sense for the nuances of language, this work, succeeded shortly by two others in a similar vein, was less a work of grammar or satire than a soberly

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<sup>6</sup> Nicolson, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> H. Rigault, Histoire de la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes (Paris, 1856); A. Tilley, The Decline of the Age of Louis XIV (New York, 1968) ch. x. Callières’ work, apparently, was used as a model by Jonathan Swift for his “Battle of the Books” (1710) after the controversy crossed the channel. cf L. Pope (ed.) Letters (1694-1700) of Francois de Callières to the Marquise d’Huxelle (Lewiston, 2004) p. 12, note 38.

<sup>8</sup> Rigault, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-35.

<sup>9</sup> On these works see: M. Rocques, “Notes sur François de Callières et ses Oeuvres Grammaticales” Mélanges Ferdinand Brunot (Paris, 1904), pp. 273-301; S. Spitou, “Aspects of Classicism: Francois de Callières and the bon mot,” Modern Language Review (April 1953), XLVIII, pp. 185-6.

<sup>10</sup> M. Keens Soper, “François de Callières,” (University of London, Ph.D. thesis, 1972), pp. 52-53.

phrased homily on declining literary standards and increasingly evident lack of good conversational taste.

Writing as an urbane observer, *un homme du monde*, Callières deplored the growing propensity towards improper word usage—jargon—among French writers, indeed among French society at large. Jargon of any kind, he maintained—whether of court, salon or bourgeois origin, was deplorable, exposed one to ridicule and hampered clarity of meaning, an essential quality in public business, diplomacy especially. His solution was a return to the classical manner, a return to elegance, refinement and taste—the so-called *bon mots*—in conversation, conduct and style.<sup>11</sup> Fundamental to all his writings, including the subsequent work *Du bel esprit* published in 1695,<sup>12</sup> is the distinctive theme later embodied in his treatise on diplomacy: that of the close ties between verbal, written and social discourse Callières sets forth these connections at the very moment when two other elements were coalescing: when the French language was acquiring an influence and precision previously unknown and when French power in Europe was preeminent. A collateral issue he addresses is that of service—the notion that a *gentilhomme* must serve the state regardless of its governmental system, adjusting his conduct as well as emotions as circumstances dictate, with self-restraint and discipline being at all times the aspirational norm. Here Callières’ admonitions must be situated within a broader societal evolution in the direction of curbing one’s passions and aspiring to more disciplined, refined behavioral standards—what we now call “emotion management.”<sup>13</sup> This in time would lead to the transcendence of mere impulse or suppression of feelings towards greater differentiation and variation in specific situational responses: a more complex scenario combining assertiveness with flexibility, accommodating a higher tension between autonomy and interdependence, between private concerns and state interest—the prescription for modern “conflict resolution” techniques of which Callières was clearly an important progenitor.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> S. Pitou, “Pascal, Callières and the *bon mot*,” *Modern Language Notes*, LXX, 6 (1955), pp. 422-423; Pope, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> F. de Callières, *Du bel esprit, où sont examinés les sentiments qu’on a d’ordinaire dans le monde*, (Paris, 1695).

<sup>13</sup> M. Keens Soper and K. W. Schweizer, *The Art of Diplomacy*, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> This concept, fundamental to the socio-genesis of modern negotiating approaches owes much to the work of N. Elias. See the latter’s *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (Basel, 1939). For a more recent critical commentary see: Willem Mastenbroek, “Negotiating as a civilizing process,” paper presented at the Elias Knofferenz, Bielefeld, 1997. <http://www.hollandconsultinggroup.com/publications.negotiating.HTM>.