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Ellen R. Welch, *A Theater of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. vi + 312 pp. Notes, bibliography, illustrations, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8122-4900-2.

Review Essay by Scott M. Sanders, Dartmouth College

In *A Theater of Diplomacy*, Ellen R. Welch ingeniously situates ancien regime entertainments within a broader theatrical practice of diplomacy wherein foreign ambassadors perform various embodied roles: actor, spectator and interpreter. As participants of diplomatic theater, ambassadors, in turn, contribute to the overall shape and reception of early-modern performing arts. For instance, Welch's chapter entitled "Exotic Audiences" examines how Asian, Middle-Eastern and African embassies could unsettle diplomatic protocols while also diminishing the aesthetic value of French performing arts. By questioning the legibility and translatability of Ancien Regime political representation, Welch contributes to a vibrant vein of scholarship. Since Robert Isherwood interpreted Jean-Baptiste Lully's *tragédie en musique* as a musical representation of absolutism, subsequent music historians have demonstrated how Baroque opera was at times inconsistent or incompatible with representations of French absolutism.[1] By incorporating historical anecdotes, which reveal the failures, accommodations and contingencies of live performance, Welch destabilizes the notion of a politically coherent artistic form, and adeptly demonstrates how the contingent factors of performance, such as the presence of foreign ambassadors, can re-configure the politico-spatial dynamics of early-modern theatrical space.

Welch argues that from the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries, foreign ambassadors influenced and even modified Ancien Regime entertainments. However, by the early eighteenth century, the "emergence of an elaborate bureaucracy for managing foreign affairs" constrained the ambassador's "autonomy," and his role shifted from that of an actor to an "automaton" (pp. 187, 190, 192). At the same time, these tightly scripted ceremonies migrated from the exclusive sphere of the court to more accessible venues such as the *Opéra* in Paris. What's more, the reading public became increasingly interested in written representations of international relations. As a consequence of these changes, "the majority of the imagined spectators for diplomacy were no longer also the lead actors in the drama of international relations" (p. 208). According to Welch, eighteenth-century forms of mediation create an aesthetic wall that separates diplomatic actors from the representation of diplomacy.

While Welch cogently synthesizes the broader trends of early eighteenth century diplomacy and performance, her narrative circumscribes France's diplomatic relations within a global context that expands outward from Europe to Africa and Asia. In an effort to evaluate Welch's claims, I have chosen a case study, specifically the 1725 Illinois Delegation to Paris, which re-orientes France in relation to the Louisiana territory. The Illinois delegation contributes a missing Native American perspective to Welch's multi-cultural analysis of French performance and diplomacy: a perspective, which is crucial to the eighteenth century because French *philosophes*, novelists,

librettists and composers produced numerous representations of Native American culture. Through a close reading of the 1725 event, I additionally cast doubt on the notion that foreign ambassadors perform the role of automatons. My case study reveals moments when Native American ambassadors subvert French protocol and insert their own agenda into diplomatic proceedings. In doing so, they assert their own agency, and become actors in diplomatic proceedings.

The Illinois influence on diplomatic ceremony is also relevant to, and nuances Welch's assessment of cross-cultural contact. By analyzing Ancien regime entertainments in dialogue with an impressive amount of archival material, Welch provides original close readings of these performances. In doing so, she demonstrates how foreign dignitaries sometimes misread, adopt or influence French aesthetics and ceremonies. Within France, Welch describes how the presence of foreign visitors sometimes necessitated a change in French protocol (pp. 176-179). Outside of France, certain courts (often European) slightly modified French aesthetics to aggrandize their own culture (p. 127). Finally, the French tried to export their performing arts to courts (mostly from non-European cultures), whose members often under-appreciated its aesthetic merits (pp. 162, 180). Welch thereby identifies three versions of cultural contact – cultural adaptation, appropriation and exportation – each of which concern the relative translatability or success of French entertainment across cultures.

The 1725 Illinois delegation contributes to Welch's discussion of cross-cultural contact, and reveals, through a close reading of the *Mercure de France's* account, how Native American ambassadors not only influenced French diplomatic protocol, but also incorporated indigenous customs. In April 1725, the Mississippi Company arranged for a large party of Native Americans to travel to Paris. Unfortunately, their ship, *La Bellone*, sank off Dauphin Island, and with it, they lost the mission's supplies. Possibly due to financial considerations, the delegation was reduced to seven members of the Illinois Confederacy: Chicagou of the Michigamea and Mamantouensa of the Kaskaskia along with ambassadors from the Missouri, the Osage, and the Oto. Accompanying the ambassadors were a slave named Pilate, the interpreter and daughter of a Missouri leader, an opportunistic *coureur-de-bois* and official representative of the Missouri Valley Indian nations, Etienne de Véniard de Bourgmont, and finally, the Jesuit missionary, Nicolas Ignace de Beaubois. After nearly a year of travelling, the delegation arrived in Paris on 20 September 1725.

For the French reading public, the *Mercure* presents a more palatable version of a visit that by some accounts was financially ruinous, disadvantageous to French interests and unsuccessful in terms of its primary goal: to showcase French magnificence.[2] Despite these problems, the *Mercure* promotes the diplomatic mission as an opportunity to impress Native Americans with “la grandeur du Roi, & de la magnificence de son Royaume.”[3] To hide any shortcomings, the *Mercure* account erects what Welch describes as the “fourth wall,” which is to say an artificial proscenium that separates public readers from diplomatic negotiations (p. 208). Instead of narrating the visit as an impartial observer, the *Mercure* portrays ceremonial events in terms that glorify the French monarchy. To that end, the official account is organized around monuments that celebrate Louis XIV's splendor. Specifically, the *Mercure* highlights monuments and cultural institutions that Louis XIV was instrumental in creating: the Hôtel des Invalides, the fountains at Versailles and the *Opéra*. [4] The *Mercure* constructs Louis XV's radiance not as an immanent quality of the monarch, but instead as a reflection of Louis XIV's magnificence.[5]

Given that Louis XV was only fifteen years-old in 1725, his embodied grandeur may have been diminished next to mature Native American leaders. This anxiety may have even influenced the *Mercure's* description of the delegation. For instance, at the beginning of the account, the *Mercure's* author shifts the reader's gaze away from an embarrassing event for the French, which is to say the sinking hulk of *La Bellone*. Instead, the author turns toward the alleged cowardice of the "Sauvages" who decided to return home.[6] During many of the delegation's encounters, the *Mercure* account uneasily describes partially naked Native Americans. Their ceremonial garb blends in with their flesh as they perform diplomatic rituals "nuds" with "tout le corps barboüillé de différentes couleurs" and "un morceau d'écarlatte" covering their "nudité." [7] The star of the delegation appeared to be Chicagou, whose participation "attira plus d'attention que les autres" [8] His magnetic presence subverts the *Mercure's* portrayal of Louis XV's grandeur, a fact, which the author minimizes. While Chicagou, for the *Mercure* author, was "très-bien fait," he was also constantly sick throughout his stay.[9] The king, perhaps betraying a touch of jealousy, cancelled the queen's audience with the delegation. According to the *Mercure*, the king did not want the queen to see Native American ambassadors in their "assortiment sauvage et trop bizarre." [10] For the fifteen-year old monarch, partially naked Native Americans might have been problematic because they were attracting the rapt attention of his courtiers, and their imposing presence may have diminished his adolescent radiance.

In this regard, the 1725 delegation undermines a late-seventeenth century preoccupation of the French court. As Welch notes, "embassies from more distant regions of Asia and North Africa ...reflected France's status as a truly global power" (p. 172). For global delegations, "the translatability of ceremonial protocol" was at times compromised because French representations of hierarchy did not always align well with its foreign counterpart (p. 173). As Welch explains, Siamese and Persian forms of hierarchy were sometimes incompatible with French ceremonies. The Illinois delegation contributes to this genealogy of diplomatic hierarchy because it upsets the very fabric of the French system. For instance, Chicagou broke protocol of rank at a courtly event, organized by the Duchess of Orleans because he asked to leave before the Duchess' departure.[11] The Illinois leader, Mamantouensa, even addressed the king informally in what might have been a strategic form of familiarity. When the Illinois leader asked Louis XV to prevent further displacement of his village, he called his tribe "mes frères" and "tes enfans." [12] The *Mercure* cleverly portrays these moments to the French court's advantage. By graciously forgiving their guests' mistakes, Louis XV's courtiers demonstrate their magnanimous spirit.[13] However, given that Illinois tribes often adopted outsiders as a political strategy of inclusion, Mamantouensa's familiarity may simply be a poorly translated offer of kinship, intended to re-organize French diplomacy around lines of Illinois kinship.[14]

What's more, the 1725 delegation negotiated cross-cultural contact in a way that nuances Welch's discussion of cultural appropriation because the ambassador Chicagou blended French beliefs with Illinois rituals.[15] The ceremonial peace pipe, *calumet* in French and *apšaganaki* in the Illinois language, was at the center of Chicagou's hybridization of French faith and Illinois culture.[16] According to Tracy Leavelle, the calumet came to symbolize for Chicagou "the shared French-Illinois attachment to Christianity" and "the diplomatic and military alliance between them." [17] As Leavelle argues, over the course of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, the Illinois converted to Christianity through a "plural, dynamic and flexible" process, which co-mingled French and Illinois forms of spirituality.[18] The *Mercure* description of Chicagou possibly hints

at the French discomfort and fascination that his hybrid faith elicited from courtiers.[19] While presenting himself as a Catholic, he took ownership of his belief, and integrated it into Illinois spiritual customs.

At the end of this diplomatic mission, the Illinois confederacy appeared to have gained more than its French counterparts. While the French obtained an ally against the Spanish, the Illinois delegates received aid in their conflict with the Fox tribe, and they also secured assurances that French colonists would not encroach on their sovereign territory.[20] The *Mercure* cleverly aestheticizes this last compromise. In the final portion of the account, the author translates the Illinois speeches as poetry, and this transformation softens the French concession with poetic repetition: “Plantez l’arbre de paix” followed by “Plantes-y des François.” In a footnote, the *Mercure* author explains that this final expression is a “façon de parler Sauvage.”[21] In other words, mediation and translation enable the *Mercure* author to diminish the diplomatic accomplishment of the Illinois, and reduce it to a poetic flourish of “Sauvage” speech.

This final transformation presents readers with the fourth wall of eighteenth-century diplomatic theatre. The poem mediates and aestheticizes the Illinois ambassador’s agency to such a degree that the *Mercure*’s readers lose sight of the embodied presence of the Illinois delegation. However, the *Mercure*’s account imperfectly arrives at this final form of mediation. Throughout its description, the Illinois delegation unsettles, outshines and reconfigures French diplomatic protocols in part because the Native American leaders flout French rules of hierarchy and blend French Catholicism with their own rituals. To conceptualize similar pluralistic perspectives, hidden within eighteenth-century diplomatic performances, scholars should develop projects that emulate Ellen Welch’s ambitious multi-cultural reading of French performing arts. Her methodology, clearly intended to speak to audiences beyond French Studies, could spark interdisciplinary collaborations whose inventive research might broaden our understanding of Ancien régime performance.

## NOTES

[1] Oliva Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 142-177; Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Catherine Gordon-Seifert, “Heroism Undone: the Erotic Manuscript Parodies of Jean-Baptiste Lully’s *Tragédies en Musique*” in Linda Austern, ed., *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 137-164; Robert Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973) 150-203; and Downing Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime, 1647-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 53-99.

[2] Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Nouveaux voyages aux Indes occidentales*, 1 (Paris: Chez le Jay, 1768) 161-164; Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage: And the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1984) 205, 223; Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 38; and Frank Norall, *Bourmont: Explorer of the Missouri, 1698-1725* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 83.

[3] *Mercure de France*, “Relation de l'arrivée en France de quatre Sauvages de Missicipi, de leur séjour, et des audiences qu'ils ont eues du Roi, des Princes du Sang, de la Compagnie des Indes, avec les complimens qu'ils ont faits, les honneurs & les presens qu'ils ont reçûs, et c.” December 1725, 2827.

[4] *Mercure*, 2830-2831. The Illinois delegation also praises the magnificence of Louis XV in heliocentric terms, a rhetorical strategy which mirrors the *Mercure's* depiction of Louis XV in relation to the *Roi Soleil*. *Mercure*, 2484.

[5] The mission did not appear to transmit an image of French magnificence to the Illinois tribe. Years later, the French explorer, Jean-Bernard Bossu, reported that Chicagou's tribe did not believe his account. The Illinois tribe, instead, believed that the French only appeared magnificent because they had tricked the delegation with supernatural tricks. See Bossu, 161-164.

[6] *Mercure*, 2828.

[7] *Ibid.*, 2829.

[8] *Ibid.*, 2838.

[9] *Ibid.*, 2830.

[10] *Ibid.*, 2850.

[11] *Ibid.*, 2855.

[12] *Ibid.*, 2844.

[13] *Ibid.*, 2855, 2859. I caution that the *Mercure* writers may also be imitating French stereotypes of Native American values.

[14] *Ibid.*, 2844; and Robert Morrissey, *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) 73.

[15] Joseph Roach's notion of surrogation and kinaesthetic imagination may aid in theorizing the transmission, adaptation and transformation of diplomatic ceremonies across the Atlantic. See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). See also *Mercure*, 2829, 2849.

[16] Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 2.

[17] Leavelle, 1.

[18] Leavelle, 8. See Leavelle, "Spiritual Gifts: Conversion as Cross-Cultural Practice," in *The Catholic Calumet*. 1-18; and Morrissey, "Collaboration and Community," in *Empire by Collaboration*. 63-84.

[19] *Mercure*, 2838.

[20] Morrissey disagrees with the notion that peace with the Fox helped the Illinois tribes. Morrissey, 121-122. See also Russell David Edmunds, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) p. 103-104; Tracy Neal Leavelle, "Geographies of Encounter: Religion and Contested Spaces in Colonial North America," *American Quarterly* 56:4 December 2004, 936; and Herman J. Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins: A History of Indian Delegations*

[21] *Mercure*, 2858.

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