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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 Sarah Alyn Stacey, Trinity College, Dublin

No specialist of the early modern period would underestimate both the place of the court in shaping international relations and, more specifically, the function of the creative artists (whether writers, artists or musicians) at the court to project a particular diplomatic identity and to engineer a particular political response. The potential discrepancy between the desired outcome and the political reality makes for an interesting coexistence between national aspiration and diplomatic outcome, the latter conflating the positions of a number of international entities and therefore being less easy to determine by one state. The articulation of the national aspiration through the performing arts suggests, then, both a confidence—not always well-founded—in the effectiveness of a very public form of diplomacy and an established political convention. The artistic performance of a particular diplomatic position permits a historian to seize better the social and political climate underpinning the international relations of the past. For this reason, Ellen R. Welch’s book is a most welcome addition to our understanding of international diplomacy in the early modern period. As the author points out in her Introduction, her study to some degree “answers John Watkins’s recent call for ‘a New Diplomatic History’ of early modern Europe: a ‘cross-disciplinary study of international relations’ that would demonstrate diplomacy’s profound entanglements with all facets of culture” (p. 10). One of the essential merits of this study is that it should further encourage scholars from across the disciplines and languages to engage in research highlighting the diplomatic function of the performing arts and spectacle generally. The pioneering scholarship in the field by scholars such as Margaret McGowan and Roy Strong, continued by Ellen R. Welch, John Walton, Michael Levin, Robyn Adams, Rosanna Cox, Julia Prest, Georgia Cowart, Ronald Love and Marie-Claude Canova-Green, to name but a few, highlights what a rich seam of research this is.[1]

The central thesis of this study is that diplomacy is very much an art of spectacle. As the author points out, “Like a play, ballet, or symphony, diplomacy requires a coordinated effort by multiple players” (p.1). Certainly the association between the world of diplomacy and the world of theatre has historically always been very strong, and, as Welch makes clear, the frequent comparisons made between the two worlds in early-modern handbooks on diplomacy should not be viewed as mere metaphors: ambassadorship was considered a performing art, the aim of which was to produce order and harmony in the world, even if only temporarily (p.1; chapter 2). The chronological structure of the book usefully allows a comprehensive appreciation of the successes and failures of the deployment of the performing arts for such diplomatic ends. The study starts with the carefully orchestrated Bayonne Entertainments of 1565 (chapter one), then analyzes the specificity of the ambassador’s gaze in shaping the diplomatic import of a particular performance (chapter two), before moving to examine the function of ballet to provide a space for international negotiation through its specific symbolic vocabulary, and its spatial, visual and musical characteristics with particular reference to the Thirty Years’ War (chapters three and four). The diplomatic function of ballet is further explored in relation to the

Congress of Westphalia (1645-49), and this analysis illustrates how international relations can be undermined by the privileging of one particular state's performance-based claim to supremacy over a balletic discourse inclined to promote a more inclusive and unified European identity (chapter five). The gradual assertion of French supremacy, and specifically of the supremacy of Louis XIV, through the performing arts further illustrates this point and explains how and why, by the late 1660s, the French court had become the European cultural capital, with, as a consequence, an increased political status in terms of European diplomatic relations (chapter six). The attendant shift in French attitude, from privileging the European community to privileging the country's individual identity as a bigger, global power, becomes noticeable at a performance level as the court invited Asian and African ambassadors (chapter seven). In the late seventeenth century, however, a trend emerged which was consolidated in the eighteenth century: the performance of diplomacy moved beyond the aristocratic parameters of the court to address the broader public, which emerged as a diplomatic entity in its own right; it was now "public diplomacy" or "cultural diplomacy" which emerged, and, arguably, these theatrical entertainments became far less relevant to the political arm of diplomacy than previously. It was now a legal and cultural training, which was key to the shaping of an ambassador (chapter eight). The book judiciously concludes that, notwithstanding these various shifts, "theater and the performing arts remain vitally linked to political life" (p. 213). A greater discussion of the function and effectiveness of public diplomacy and its role in shaping diplomatic relations would be welcomed but could easily be the matter of a further book.

A particular merit of *Theater of Diplomacy* is the clarity with which it plots how the theory and practice of diplomacy became strictly codified from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, culminating in the coherent and generally accepted European model established by the time of the Congress of Utrecht in 1713. This resultant diplomatic system, upon which the modern system is predicated, brought about an important shift in terms of European power-broking: the pope was no longer the primary negotiator between princes, the Catholic Church having been severely weakened by the Reformation, and the Holy Roman Empire was no longer a unifying force. In response to what Welch terms, appropriately, "the fracturing of the European political community" (p. 5), the place and agents of negotiation do, then, become increasingly secular in formalized practice: the court and the ambassadors, the mediators of the respective king's political positions become key to brokering international deals and to maintaining (as far as possible) a stable community of European states. As Welch observes:

In this sense, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent a prolonged transitional—or perhaps liminal—period in which Europe as an idea and as a community of states underwent a crisis and (partial, temporary) resolution of its identity (p. 6).

As Welch ably demonstrates, the role of the theatrical entertainments organized and witnessed by diplomats complemented in no small way the functions and intentions of the official ambassadorial missions. This culture of diplomatic entertainment developed in tandem with the recodifying of diplomacy and obeyed the same principles. Consequently, the representation and accentuation of the monarch's magnificence is of paramount importance. The function of such displays is to articulate a message of political powerfulness to both a domestic and a foreign audience. The displays serve also to project visually, through allegorical iconography, theories of international relations, as evidenced notably during the last decade of the Thirty Years' War and the Congress of Westphalia by the French 'ballets des nations,' which distilled into allegorical form France's relations with Spain and the Italian and German states. These

performances brought the international diplomatic community together in practices which, given the aristocratic class of the ambassadors, provided a recognizable and common cultural terrain propitious for positive diplomatic interaction. As Welch observes, as a consequence of these diplomatic performances, Europe emerges as a malleable and performative category with each reiteration on stage reflecting and responding to shifting political contexts.

The potential role of these performances in the healing of international tensions, and in the promotion of *concordia* and *communitas* should not be underestimated. In engaging with this function, Welch's study complements well Timothy Hampton's *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2009), a complementarity she points to in her Introduction (p.7). But neither should the failure of these displays to induce the preferred diplomatic response be underestimated. If the performances would aim, primarily through language, iconography, use of music and dance, to create an ideal spectacle of harmonious international relations, the preferred course of action which they articulated was not always adopted. Welch acknowledges this (p.7) and it would certainly be interesting to see examples of such discrepancy examined, although this would undoubtedly merit a separate analysis.

The discrepancy between the performed projection of a diplomatic ideal and the refusal to implement it at a political level reminds us that if, as Timothy Hampton puts it, literature may act as "a space and tool of compromise,"[2] ultimately the diplomatic decisions taken, reflect, and are built upon, a separate strand of negotiation, one which is ultimately more private and far less public (and this, of course, obtains today).

The focus of Welch's study is the French use of performing arts to project a particular diplomatic identity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and this is key to explaining and illustrating the significance of the performing arts to diplomacy at a European level: as she points out, from the time of Catherine de Medici onwards, the French court established itself as the key place in Europe for the development of "diplomatic performance," and its diplomatic literary forms, most notably the *ballet de cour*, were widely emulated abroad. Consequently, by the seventeenth century and the reign of Louis XIV, the French court had become an esteemed model throughout Europe for the development both of the performing arts generally and of its "theatre of diplomacy." The status of France as a key diplomatic model to be followed was reinforced also by the treatises on the subject of negotiation written by such internationally influential figures as François de Callières. As a result of this foregrounding of diplomacy as a major theme in the realm of the performing arts and in political writing, France's identity as a diplomatic model to be emulated was secured. Essentially, diplomacy became French, both in language and in its practices.

If the major focus of Welch's study is the performance art of ballet, many of her observations ring true with regard to the French political poetry produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The political poetry of the Pléiade and the group's followers[3] is an obvious example, although its performance aspect has been little studied, with the notable exception of Frances Yates's magisterial work on Antoine de Baïf.[4] A comprehensive analysis permitting an overview (such as that provided by Welch) of the diplomatic function of such poetical works is long overdue. The poetry produced at the Court of Savoy is a particularly interesting case in point. My own research on the Savoyard poet Marc-Claude de Buttet (1529/31-1586) and his entourage has highlighted the diplomatic case of a poet caught up in a conflict between his native Savoy and France subsequent to the French invasion of Savoy in 1536 and the alliance between the Duke of Savoy, Emmanuel-Philibert, and his uncle, Charles V, against the

Valois.[5] Buttet, in the odes he composed in Paris during the 1550s, prior to the conclusion in 1559 of peace between France and Savoy, diplomatically praised both sides.[6] In one particular ode, he even evoked the Battle of Saint Quentin (August 1557) in which the Imperial forces, under the command of the Savoyard Duke, slaughtered the French forces. He emphasized, however, the prowess of François de Lorraine, Duke of Guise, the poignancy of the slaughter, and passed quickly to the Duke's successful recapture of Calais.[7] After the conclusion of peace and his return to the duchy, however, Buttet composes for the Duke of Savoy *La Victoire*, a lengthy ode on the same battle, and the tone is diametrically opposed to the earlier evocation since it celebrates unequivocally the defeat of the French.[8] Published at a time when the Duke was following up on the terms of the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559) to secure the return of his occupied territories, the piece reads as a confident and stark assertion of Savoyard supremacy over the French and as a refusal to engage in diplomatic niceties. Its place of publication, Antwerp, in a region of which the Duke of Savoy was governor, may have determined this tone.

On various occasions Welch underscores the significance of diplomatic hierarchy in her work and this recalls another aspect of Savoyard diplomacy. The desire to be recognized as being on an equal footing with the monarchy led the House of Savoy to prefix its name with the adjective *reale* or *royale*.^[9] The performance aspect of titles used by the House of Savoy points to another important area of international diplomacy and also invites a further discussion of the engagement between the smaller and larger diplomatic powers in the early modern period.

To conclude, Welch highlights very lucidly the interconnection between diplomacy and the performing arts in the early modern period, but we should be mindful that the connection between orchestrated performance and diplomacy pre-dates the mid sixteenth century, this book's starting point.^[10] The study very usefully invites us to reflect upon the concept of what constitutes a performance, and clearly that definition transcends the officially recognized "performing arts," the (coherent) remit of this study. At court, the heart of the international diplomatic circles, the performance of titles, royal entries, pageants, music, poetry, bestowing a gift, must all be seen as equally motivated by, and interpreted as, the desire to construct a particular diplomatic image and set of international relations. Consequently, the potential conflict between, on the one hand, the theories and aspirations of diplomatic negotiation and, on the other, the actual performance of diplomacy, highlights the historical precariousness of international relations, a point well made by Welch.

NOTES

[1] See in particular the very detailed bibliography in Ellen Welch's study, pp. 271-288.

[2] Hampton, 5.

[3] I shall not limit myself to the *brigade* in light of the long-forgotten authors who have, in recent years, come to light, for example, Marc-Claude de Buttet and Jean de la Gessée to name but two.

[4] Frances Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Warburg Institution, The University of London, 1947).

[5] On this see my article, “Between Two Courts: Nationhood and Diplomacy in the Works of Marc-Claude de Buttet, 1554-1561,” in *Court, Text and Humour in the French Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Professor Pauline Smith*, ed., Sarah Alyn Stacey (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 55-78. Amongst my various publications on Buttet, see notably *Marc-Claude de Buttet 1529/31-1586 : l’honneur de la Savoie* (Paris: Champion, 2006) ; “Le Poète Savoyard de la Renaissance : Marc-Claude de Buttet 1529/31-1586,” in *Histoire de la littérature savoyarde*, ed., Louis Terreaux (Montmélian: Académie de Savoie, 2010), pp. 203-229.

[6] *Le Premier Livre des vers [...] auquel a esté ajouté le second ensemble L’Amalthée* (Paris, Michel Fezandat, 1560). I have recently completed a critical edition of each of these volumes and they will be appearing shortly. See also my work on Buttet’s first known published work in Sarah Alyn Stacey, ed., *Political, Religious and Social Conflict in the States of Savoy 1400-1700*, *Medieval and Early Modern French Studies*, 14 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), “Marc-Claude de Buttet’s ‘Apologie [...] pour la Savoie’ (1554): Conflicting Perceptions of the 1536 French Invasion of Savoy,” 77-95; “An Edition of the ‘Apologie de Marc-Claude de Buttet pour la Savoie’” (1554), 97-123.

[7] *Le Premier Livre des vers [...]*, II, ed. Fezandat, fol. 48 r, IX.

[8] *La Victoire de tres-haut et magnanime prince Emanuel Philibert duc de Savoie* (Anvers: Pierre Mathieu, 1561).

[9] On this see Toby Osbourne, “Language and Sovereignty: the Use of Titles and Savoy’s Royal Declaration of 1632,” in ed., Sarah Alyn Stacey, *Political, Religious and Social Conflict in the States of Savoy, 1400-1700*, pp. 15-34.

[10] To cite just two obvious examples: the international and national jousting tournaments at the medieval court; the Field of Cloth of Gold (1520), a clear example of a political performance aimed at producing a particular diplomatic outcome.

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