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Isabelle Daunais and Allan Hepburn, eds., *Diplomacy and the Modern Novel: France, Britain, and the Mission of Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2020. viii + 244 pp. \$65.00 CAN (hb). ISBN 9781487508098; \$65.00 CAN (eb). ISBN 9781487537548.

Review by Lynn A. Higgins, Dartmouth College.

This engaging collection of essays explores the presence of diplomacy and diplomats in selected French and British writings—mostly novels—during the first half of the twentieth century. Contributors trace the transition from nineteenth-century modes of negotiation to the modern diplomatic strategies practiced at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and then to the Cold War and the early years of nuclear diplomacy. The essays are wide-ranging: “diplomatic fiction” is defined for the volume as referring to “novels by diplomats, novels about diplomacy, and narrative strategies that have common cause with diplomatic discourse” (p. 4). The authors address exclusively British and French cases, because, according to the introduction, these two countries have a rich history of interactions, and each has an abundant corpus of novelistic representations. It is also worth noting that the collection itself negotiates similar boundaries: four essays are by literary scholars based in US institutions and two are based in France. The remaining contributors—about half, including both editors—are based in Canadian universities, and the volume was published by the University of Toronto Press. That might suggest that the collection is marked by a context where navigating English and French languages and cultural traditions is, perhaps subliminally, a quotidian necessity. In this way, the book itself not only discusses but also performs diplomacy.

The volume is divided into four sections, preceded by an opening essay, “The Mission of Literature: Modern Novels and Diplomacy” by co-editor Allan Hepburn (McGill University), that serves as introduction. After outlining differences between “old” and “new” diplomacies, Hepburn sets out the parameters that inform the cross-disciplinary comparisons that follow. Diplomacy and the novel involve representation, and language is central to the endeavors of both. Diplomats and novelists represent an absent source of authority (a government, an extra-textual reality) by manipulating multiple points of view. Using the example of Proust’s diplomat character, Norpois, Hepburn examines in more depth the distortions of time that characterize both novelistic and diplomatic functioning. Both must master a rhetoric of indirect expression—of nuance, ambiguity, and evasion—and of performance and theatricality, where things are rarely as they seem. It is thus not surprising that many career diplomats, aware of these analogies and other rhetorical gymnastics and adept at the dispatches and written reports that incorporate them, might also try their hand at fiction writing.

Part one, “Diplomatic Experience,” is devoted to diplomats who also authored memoirs and novels, putting special emphasis on possible correlations between the two forms. In “Making a Song and

Dance of It: Staging Diplomacy in William Gerhardt's Early Novels," Claire Davison (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle) identifies a mode of fiction that she calls the "European novel of diplomacy," a form that "combine[s] political, rhetorical, and literary strategies in the crafting of plot" (p. 29). Among these strategies is "a heightened sense of theatricality" that "represent[s] statecraft in terms of stagecraft" (p. 29). Davison goes on to examine the modulations of Gerhardt's writing across cultural boundaries (he is known as the "English Chekhov") in a "trans-European intertextuality" that is specifically modernist (p. 32).

In "The League of Nations as Seen by Albert Cohen," Maxime Decout (Université de Lille) details Cohen's career as a civil servant and his depiction in his satirical novels of diplomacy as a bureaucracy, where an overriding concern for form over substance and for absurd gestures over real communication produces a state of crisis in language and in values. For Cohen, a careful reader of Proust's *Norpois*, it's only a short step from there to comedy and the carnivalesque. Proust makes another appearance in the essay on Harold Nicolson by Caroline Z. Krzakowski (Northern Michigan University), where we read of an intriguing encounter between the two men that may have helped shape the writings of both. Nicolson played a junior role in the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Krzakowski's close readings uncover formal and thematic connections of Nicolson's writings between political memoir and fictional narrative. The essay suggests that the transition to the "new" diplomacy demanded new forms of representation that would convey both historical facts and individual experience.

Part two, "Novels and Diplomacy," takes up fictional representations of diplomacy and diplomats. Co-editor Isabelle Daunais (McGill University) posits, in "Diplomatic Dispatch Style: Towards a New Aesthetic of the Novel," the existence during the interwar period of a novelistic movement or style shared by Paul Claudel, Valéry Larbaud, Paul Morand and others and modeled on diplomatic communications, a form she calls, after Albert Thibaudet, "la littérature de la valise" (p. 86). She examines the style's features through representations of trains and speed, urban environments, and discontinuous and inconclusive narratives. In "Conrad's Politics of Idealism: Diplomacy without Diplomats," Stephen Ross (University of Victoria) explains that the terms we use today to speak of diplomacy were imposed in French and then also appeared in English during the French Revolution as a deliberate "displacement of pedigree with civil accreditation" (p. 101). The neologisms were "part of an egalitarian lexicon opposed to that of the *ancien régime*. For *aristocratie* they devised *diplomatie*; for *aristocrate*, *diplomate*; and for *aristocratique*, *diplomatique*" (p. 101). Ross analyses four novels in the light of Conrad's nostalgia for pre-revolutionary legitimacy and his disdain for the professional diplomat, culminating in a vision for a kind of novel that might succeed at diplomacy where diplomats inevitably failed.

Michel Biron (McGill University) offers a complementary case study in "André Gide and the Art of Evasion," where he shows how Gide's preoccupation with sincerity and authenticity was pitted against the necessary evasions and duplicities of the diplomatic life. This struggle with the (in)compatibility of diplomatic and literary values is brought into relief in Gide's correspondence with Claudel, where the two writers confront the role of "writer-diplomat" in divergent ways. With these considerations in view, one can better understand Gide's forays into international settings (in the Congo and the Soviet Union especially) and appreciate the twists and ironies in his novels, particularly, here, *Les Caves du Vatican* (*The Vatican Cellars*).

Part three, "Documents," highlights the use of archival sources, in this instance unpublished letters, in bringing to light the novelist's behind-the-scenes experimentations and struggles with artistic

dilemmas. As indicated in the volume's introduction, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign possesses the largest Proust archive outside France, and François Proulx may have had some hand in his university's 2016 acquisition of nine previously unpublished letters to and from Marcel Proust. In any case, in "Proust's Epistolary Diplomacy: Antoine Bibesco, René Peter, and 'Salaïsme,'" Proulx makes good use of the archive to investigate the disguises, theatricality, circumlocutions, and other coded language and rhetorical strategies deployed by Proust and his correspondents to speak about queerness ("Salaïsme"), showing in the process to what extent negotiating the worlds of diplomacy and queerness were analogous exercises. Allan Hepburn returns with "The Art of Conversation: Nancy Mitford, France, and Cultural Diplomacy," which draws on Mitford's unpublished correspondence that resides in an archive at Princeton University. Like Harold Nicolson and others, Mitford came from a family of ambassadors and statesmen (a paradoxical *aristocratie diplomatique*), and the essay details Mitford's commitment to furthering cordial Franco-British relations. Hepburn's account of Mitford's unofficial or "cultural" diplomacy is particularly revelatory of the gender politics behind the absence of women from the world of diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s. It also reveals the extent to which Mitford excelled at using the subterfuges of diplomatic language and comportment to carve out a place for herself in that diplomatic universe.

Part four, "Foreign Affairs," looks outward from France and Britain toward relations with other nations. In "Action, Diplomacy, Art: André Malraux and Graham Greene," Robert L. Caserio (Pennsylvania State University) takes on two writers' ambivalence faced with the burdens of representation in both writing and diplomacy. In his novel, *Man's Fate*, as in his life, "[a]ction is Malraux's chosen medium" (p. 180), and yet, Malraux embraced the constraints of serving as de Gaulle's minister of culture. Graham Greene faced a similar internal debate, as Caserio dissects in Greene's *The Honorary Consul* and *Monsignor Quixote*.

Another pair of writers offers two starkly divergent approaches to action, as can be discovered in "Mythography and Diplomacy in Works by Ian Fleming and John le Carré" by Maxime Prévost (University of Ottawa). As contrasted with the righteous masks of public diplomats, spies have a freer range of legal and extra-legal methods at their disposal. Prévost argues that Fleming's novelistic representations portray a fantastical and thrilling universe of espionage, while le Carré offers a demystifying (and doubtless more realistic) counter-portrait of the less glamorous, even tedious tasks that fall to behind-the-scenes negotiators.

Finally, in "Lawrence Durrell: Diplomacy as Farce," Maria Dibattista (Princeton University) plumbs the comic potential that lurks within the moral and verbal acrobatics commonly deployed in diplomatic negotiations. Referring to Northrop Frye and Freud, Dibattista shows how Durrell's characters straddle the thin line that separates humor from suffering and farce from its origins in tragedy. That line is especially treacherous in the context of cross-cultural (mis)communication, and it points to the ultimately limited efficacy of human intervention in events.

This brief overview cannot possibly do justice to the intricacies of these multifarious excursions to the places where the novelist's and the diplomat's representational practices converge. The book is insightful, uniformly well written, lucidly argued, and fun to read. Few readers will be deeply familiar with all the novels studied, and I, for one, have made a few additions to my must-read list.

The editors admit that the book's organization could have taken many forms, and it is not always clear why a particular essay appears in one section rather than another. (For example, le Carré and Fleming might have appeared in part one on diplomats who authored novels.) However, a loose and

minimally boxed-in organization has the advantage of highlighting the many cross currents and echoes that traverse the collection from section to section and weave the essays together.

The book addresses countless productive questions, many in depth and some in passing, and there are inevitably a few missed opportunities. Most tantalizing of these are the assertions that pop up repeatedly positing correlations between shifts in the history of diplomacy and the evolution of the novel. Characteristic stylistic features and experimentation with new or hybrid genres are evoked in several essays, in part four especially. More recourse to theories or philosophies of representation might clarify the diplomat-novelists' quests for literary forms and illuminate connections between diplomacy and Modernism.

A second theme that invites more direct and sustained attention is the role of gender at the intersections of diplomacy and the novel. Allan Hepburn vividly portrays Nancy Mitford, her family, her circle, and her era, conveying in the process her use of conventionally feminine behavior to make herself into a diplomat in all but name. In that context, the ironic, gendered connotations of the phrase "cultural diplomacy" are hard to miss and invite more explicit exploration of its implications. In a related vein, Claire Davison observes the use of masculine pronouns in discussions of diplomats. She notes that "The pronoun is of course gendered, not 'gender-neutral.' Neither conventional diplomacy nor literary representations of the diplomat offer any insightful models of female diplomats" (p. 48n9). The collection bears out that assertion without further exploring it, leaving me hungry for more analysis of the gendered nature of the diplomatic and therefore fictional worlds studied. It would be particularly important to test the (necessarily?) masculinist perspective inherent in both diplomacy and the diplomatic novel. For example, Robert L. Caserio's analysis of the tension between direct (even violent) action and (novelistic and diplomatic) rhetoric in the work of Malraux and Greene might be a jumping-off point for investigating concepts of masculinity.

But *Diplomacy and the Modern Novel* covers a lot of territory, and one can't do everything in a single volume. If provoking interest and pointing in new directions are among the objectives of an essay collection, then this volume is a resounding success.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Allen Hepburn, *The Mission of Literature: Modern Novels and Diplomacy*

Part One: Diplomatic Experience

Claire Davison, *Making a Song and Dance of It: Staging Diplomacy in William Gerhardi's Early Novels*

Maxime Decout, *The League of Nations as Seen by Albert Cohen: A User's Guide to Social Magic*

Caroline Z. Krzakowski, *Modern Negotiations: Harold Nicolson's *Peacemaking, 1919* and *Public Faces**

Part Two: Novels and Diplomacy

Isabelle Daunais, *Diplomatic Dispatch Style: Towards a New Aesthetic of the Novel*

Stephen Ross, Conrad's Politics of Idealism: Diplomacy without Diplomats

Michel Biron, André Gide and the Art of Evasion

Part Three: Documents

François Proulx, Proust's Epistolary Diplomacy: Antoine Bibesco, René Peter, and 'Salaïsme'

Allan Hepburn, The Art of Conversation: Nancy Mitford, France, and Cultural Diplomacy

Part Four: Foreign Affairs

Robert L. Caserio, Action, Diplomacy, Art: André Malraux and Graham Greene

Maxime Prévost, Mythography and Diplomacy in Works by Ian Fleming and John le Carré

Maria DiBattista, Lawrence Durrell: Diplomacy as Farce

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