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Ellen R. Welch. *A Theater of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France.* Haney Foundation Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 312 pp. $75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4900-2.

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In *A Theater of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France*, Ellen R. Welch scrutinizes diplomatic entertainment hosted by the French court between 1565 and 1714. In each example, Welch analyzes the important dialogue between the theater and European diplomacy, both in how diplomacy relied on elaborate staged entertainment and in how diplomacy mimicked the art of the stage itself. Though Welch notices some broad changes in the character and role of diplomatic exchanges leading up to the Congress of Vienna in 1815, her aim is not to present a history of diplomacy—though the book is organized chronologically—or even to trace its specific changes from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Rather, she chooses pointed moments—on borderlands, early in Louis XIV's reign, at the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War, for example—when diplomatically themed ballets and other entertainment interacted with the peace-building process. Welch meditates on each instance to reach a deeper understanding of the significance of the dances and how they may have even intervened in the pressing negotiations that followed. Each chapter is dedicated not only to the specific time frame or set series of performances but also to a broader theme. This structure allows her to talk about diplomacy in the confines of court culture, in the more spacious and unpredictable public, in how it shifted to involve dignitaries from outside Europe and how it influenced early ideas of national culture. Throughout, she also emphasizes the primacy of France in early modern diplomacy, both as a country that physically hosted the negotiations and staged the spectacles, and as a country that used entertainment to exert its authority over all of Europe. While her book is firmly rooted in other literary, anthropological, and performance studies and their companion theories, there is plenty here to illuminate and enrich historians' understanding of diplomacy and spectacle in early modern France.

In her introduction, Welch explains the inherent theatricality of diplomacy in the early modern period and establishes the need to view it through the lens of what occurred on the stage during court entertainment. Both theatrical and diplomatic performances depended on each other to be understood—focusing on just one may obscure the full meaning of the other. Welch argues for a "seamless" connection between the two. Ambassadors themselves were actors: they participated in some of the choreographed theatricals, acting out their sovereigns' ambitions on the stage, and at all times embodied the "'dignity' of their sover-

eigns," for the duration of the diplomatic mission (p. 3). On or off stage, then, there existed little in the way of a clear line between diplomats and actors, between theater and reality.

In the early chapters, Welch distinguishes the performances and spectacles as multifaceted and not easily contained, in ways that could purposely mean different things to different people. Classical symbols and allegories were tied to specific cultural backgrounds, so that plays could communicate multiple messages at the same time, or communicate information to one set of diplomats while concealing it from other. The audience of the spectacle itself could be fractured, since the entertainment at the center was not the only thing being watched or performed, but sometimes served a central setting for the other performances taking place between the dignitaries themselves.

As Welch moves forward in her book and into the middle of the seventeenth century, she focuses much of her attention on early modern ballet, which relied on national stereotypes to portray the different nations interacting as characters on stage, challenging the audience to contemplate the things that differentiated European nations. In these fascinating chapters, Welch argues for the important role ballets played in helping viewers envision abstract concepts in a materialized way. For example, the ***Comédie Héroique***, commissioned by Cardinal Richelieu toward the end of his life, portrayed Europe, personified as a beautiful queen, attended by ladies in waiting who represented major metropolitan areas, such as Naples and Milan, while the suitors France, Spain, and Germany vied for her affections. But more than the passive object of these countries' desires, Europe expressed her own agency in a way that represented what the future could look like if the various countries portrayed entered a time of peace. As a play, it encouraged the separate characters or countries to all work for the benefit of the character Europe, for the ideal of a geographical Europe of peace. Similarly, the ***Ballet de Paix*** performed at the Congress of Westphalia to negotiate the end of the Thirty Years' War supplied more than mere spectacle. The multi-genre ballet provided "a common space, language, and performative practice as tools for reinventing the international community" (p. 113). It reminded the audience members of their shared goal as ambassadors in search of peace and reaffirmed their commonalities as Christians in contrast to the Ottoman Empire to the east. In addition, all the spectators could contemplate their commonalities around the very act of watching a dance, as dancing constituted an important part of every court and every noble upbringing.

These two brief samples from the heart of her book exhibit Welch's approach to art and diplomacy in early modern Europe in ways that complement historians' usual approach to diplomatic, military, and political history. Many historians—such as Paul Sonnino (***Mazarin's Quest: The Congress of Westphalia and the Coming of the Fronde*** [2008]) and Peter H. Wilson (***The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy*** [2009])—have deeply mined the correspondence of military leaders and ambassadors at the time to understand the political and international machinations. Welch's book adds another necessary layer to our understanding of European history by putting these entertainments at the heart of larger political considerations. As Welch continues into the era of Louis XIV, she shows how ballets and court demonstrations could heal domestic wounds as well as international ones, with the ***Ballet Royal de la Nuit***, for example, which followed the ending of the Fronde. Here, Louis XIV appeared as the dawn, bringing order to chaos, and his nobles, including some of those who had recently rebelled, paid him due deference. Yet even this was likely designed to show off to foreign visitors how strongly Louis XIV ruled his kingdom. Welch emphasizes that the ballets performed right after the Fronde and during the English civil war can be best understood as a "theater of hospitality," in which the

French demonstrated their authority as host to the fleeing English king, while also welcoming him to exercise his agency as a guest (p. 140). Welch also shows another side to the coin, that not all visiting ambassadors enjoyed the entertainments, citing Thomas-Francois Chabod, marquis de Saint-Maurice, the ambassador from Savoy. He found the balls and ballets at Versailles expensive and a nuisance, in which he was pushed, shoved, and herded this way and that, only to see bits of the lavish entertainment from afar while waiting for food.

Unlike the poor marquis, Welch's readers have an unobstructed view of the courtly gatherings and dances, thanks to her detailed and vivid accounts of these lavish court entertainments, which are great fun to read. She consulted as much remaining evidence of these dances as possible, from scores, to librettos, to the occasional letters of diplomat viewers. Though the sources Welch is working from are often scattered or incomplete, she still presents impressive spectacles pieced together from what has survived. Viewers rarely mention the extent to which this entertainment inspired their own court performance, but Welch uses the context of the time period, precedence, and a host of other factors to determine how these performances would have resonated with their viewers.

Welch's book gently tapers off as she comes into the eighteenth century, briefly examining how court spectacle exposed and either celebrated or critiqued the differences between European customs and norms and those of Africa or Asia. She spends some time unpacking an episode where emissaries from Siam became gravely insulted over differences in theater-seating protocol. When some of the diplomatic performances moved into public opera houses, the tone of diplomatic ceremony and protocol shifted, as foreign ambassadors could communicate more freely in public spaces, liberated from the confines of the court. The public also became spectators in diplomatic affairs, and brought negotiations into a wider realm beyond sovereigns and their ambassadors. As she closes with a brief glance at the Congress of Vienna, Welch reminds the reader that the roots of that most important peace gathering lay in this long history of spectacle and tradition in early modern Europe.

Her book might leave historians wondering how effective these entertainments were in swaying diplomats to acknowledge French supremacy or aid the peace process. Would a particularly well-executed performance entice diplomats to sympathize with French aims and sacrifice some of their sovereign's desires to establish peace? Could a poorly received or executed ballet throw diplomatic relations into jeopardy? What was the relationship between the trained actors and dancers and the diplomats who took part in the elaborate spectacles? Reading Welch's book cannot help but raise further questions about the power dynamics at court, and that attests to its value. Her book leaves us asking more questions. Welch makes a convincing case that these ballets and spectacles were not mere background entertainment but actively interacted with and facilitated diplomatic work. Her analysis of the intricate and sometimes odd-seeming dances, costumes, and stories is also incredibly helpful. She forces us to reckon with how countries that have waged war and committed atrocities against each other, even vilified and dehumanized each other in their propaganda, can manage a peace. Welch does not project any of her research onto current affairs, but one cannot help but wonder if, in our own troubled world, the play's the thing.

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