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Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture

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palgrave
macmillan

47. Camden, *Remains*, pp. 145 and 403n. Dunn credits Jonson with the invention of this anagram, although I suspect that he borrowed it from Camden.
48. Graham Parry (1981) *The Golden Age Restor'd: The culture of the Stuart Court, 1603–42* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 64.
49. Stephen Orgel (1970) ed., *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 481n.
50. H&S VIII. 202–12, ll.33–40.
51. The epigram is from Martial II.lxxxvi, 9–10; see *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, George Parfitt (1975, repr. 1996) ed. (London: Penguin), p. 611n and H&S XI.74–5.

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The Ambassador's Household: Sir Henry Wotton, Domesticity, and Diplomatic Writing

Mark Netzloff

After a decades-long period of neglect, the study of early modern diplomacy has experienced a revival in the past several years, with important contributions from historians such as Daniela Frigo and Douglas Biow and literary scholars including Timothy Hampton and John Watkins.¹ As Watkins has recently argued, 'the time has come for a multi-disciplinary reevaluation of one of the oldest, and traditionally one of the most conservative, subfields in the modern discipline of history: the study of premodern diplomacy'.² An examination of the historical foundations of the diplomatic system is especially pertinent due to the catastrophic failure of diplomacy in our own time. At a historical moment when our states have actively circumvented not merely diplomatic protocol but also, and more significantly, foundational premises of international law, we find ourselves turning to what Watkins accurately describes as a problematically conservative field. This position in which we find ourselves is oddly, reminiscently early modern. As James Der Derian points out, the most significant early modern efforts to theorize sovereignty similarly emerged out of contexts of political upheaval, from Jean Bodin and the French civil wars, and Hugo Grotius and the Thirty Years' War, to Hobbes and the English Revolution.³ But these figures also inaugurated a tradition in which theories of sovereignty were analysed at a remove from diplomatic practice, something that continues to characterize much contemporary work on diplomatic history and international relations: 'Diplomacy', Der Derian notes, 'has been particularly resistant to theory'.⁴

As a way of reflecting on the theoretical preconditions that informed diplomatic practice, this essay examines the social and material life of the early modern embassy. Through a discussion of the career and correspondence of Sir Henry Wotton, England's resident ambassador

in Venice through much of the Jacobean period, my focus is not the diplomatic content of these embassies but rather the unique position of the embassy as a space of residence, domestic business, and social and pedagogical conduct. Offsetting the naturalized assumption that diplomacy follows prescribed rules and universal protocols, I instead emphasize the extent to which its practices are shaped by the actions, agendas, and personal styles of its contributing agents. As Der Derian has commented, 'some of the most "trivial" matters have been crucial – and neglected – factors in the formation of diplomatic practices'.⁵ This essay therefore analyses the everyday matter of the embassy: not only gossip, informal espionage, and even interior decorating, but especially the material practices and social dynamics of letter writing. 'The early modern state', Lynne Magnusson notes, 'transacted its administrative business, for the most part, in personal letters'.⁶ The circulation of news and intelligence, one of the embassy's primary functions, conferred a central role to a multinational staff of secretaries and correspondents. In its anomalous, extraterritorial position – as a national space beyond the nation and a household outside the familial structure – Wotton's embassy re-imagined 'domestic' identities by elaborating alternative affective ties based on adoption, affiliation, and mentorship.

The Jacobean period offers a particularly useful historical case study due to James I's efforts to place diplomacy at the center of his foreign policy. In order to achieve these objectives, he needed a new diplomatic corps of state agents to serve abroad. Because the English state had severed diplomatic relations with every European nation over the final twenty years of Elizabeth's reign,⁷ James had to revive a defunct institutional structure to manage inter-state negotiations, and his efforts to inaugurate a mode of public diplomacy led to a broader cultural examination of the role of ambassadors and other diplomatic agents, with the initial publication of diplomatic handbooks such as Jean Hotman's *The Ambassador* (1603) occurring in the first years of his reign. As a new class of subjects was recruited to staff England's permanent embassies, one of the key figures entering this political vacuum was Wotton, who would serve as James's resident ambassador to Venice in three separate terms over the following twenty years.

Logan Pearsall Smith, the early twentieth-century editor of Wotton's letters, encapsulates the critical assessment that this figure has traditionally received: 'Wotton is of more interest to us as a writer of letters, full of wit and gossip, than as a statesman.'⁸ This comment is indicative of what has traditionally counted as the subject of the study of diplomacy, and is premised on the assumption that the ambassador solely maintains

a public, bureaucratic role, an identity that necessarily excludes the subjective traces of his own personality. It also reflects the extent to which the analysis of diplomacy is shaped by a modern bureaucratic paradigm that confines diplomacy to the domain of an 'administrative process', relegating it to an instrumental position in the formal negotiations between state bodies.⁹ But as Daniela Frigo has recently argued, early modern diplomacy is more effectively analysed in terms of the role or office of the ambassador rather than in an abstracted sense of a 'sphere of formalized actions'.¹⁰ The historical ascendancy of a bureaucratic model of the diplomat has obscured recognition of the distinctive modes of agency and practices of writing exercised by ambassadors in the early modern period. These prior and competing forms of diplomacy, if not generally ignored, are consequently relegated to a private, literary sphere lying outside the public, institutional domain of diplomacy.

Early modern ambassadors vied to establish a bureaucratic identity for themselves as a way of arrogating a degree of political agency. Particularly since many resident ambassadors hailed from civic, professional classes, or were younger sons of gentry or aristocratic families, the nascent civil service offered them a rare venue for meritocratic social advancement.¹¹ But the lack of precedents for this kind of social model forced diplomatic culture to adhere to the rules of court culture, a dynamic that additionally stemmed from economic necessity, since ambassadors had to keep tabs on the English court as a way of ensuring their own pay and promotion. Offsetting the social and economic straits that often accompanied their position, Jacobean ambassadors were instrumental in professionalizing the diplomatic service, and they did so by forging what was primarily a corporate, bureaucratic identity. But the depersonalized, institutional forms of writing of Wotton's colleagues, such as Sir Thomas Edmondes in Brussels or Sir Charles Cornwallis in Madrid, were countered by the ways that Wotton himself maintained a distinctive style throughout his correspondence. This personalized signature – what Smith described as the literary qualities of Wotton's 'wit' – did not merely inflect his diplomatic life; rather, it was through this affective register that his diplomatic identity itself was constructed. A subjective emphasis on intimacy and sociability was intrinsic to Wotton's fashioning of himself as a professional and political subject. As he wrote to his new colleague Sir Walter Aston, recently dispatched to Madrid, 'Besides our own private friendship, we are now consociates in the public service.'¹²

The identity of a professional diplomatic corps began to take shape under the direction of James and with the establishment of permanent embassies at Venice, Paris, The Hague, and Madrid. The lateral relations forged among ambassadors played a crucial role in this process of nascent professionalism, as did the social life within the embassy, particularly the affective, everyday commerce between diplomats and members of their staff. As reflected in Wotton's comment to Aston, diplomats represented their social environment in the terms of the literary coterie, with its dominant languages of friendship and sociability. The interplay of sovereignty and intimacy, which, as Laurie Shannon has demonstrated, served as a register through which sovereigns forged bonds with their subjects and advisors, was just as integral a framework in defining relations among state agents.¹³ In initiating his correspondence with Sir Ralph Winwood, for example, Wotton subordinated professional duties to the ties of friendship: 'I will not only interchange with you the offices of a public minister, but as diligently and more affectionately the respects and duties of a friend.'¹⁴

The central importance of codes of sociability and personal affect is seen most fully in the extensive correspondence between Wotton and his colleague Sir Dudley Carleton. The increasing enmity that marks their epistolary exchanges stemmed in part from the inherent competitiveness of diplomatic service: Carleton had succeeded Wotton as ambassador to Venice in 1610, only to be replaced in turn by Wotton when the latter began his second term in 1616. Throughout this period, each vied for the resident ambassadorship at The Hague, Carleton's former post and a more desirable position, a rivalry that led to a rapid decline in the civility of their correspondence. The brief tenure of most ambassadors, and the frequency with which they exchanged posts, facilitated the professionalization of diplomatic service by limiting the extent to which office and office-holder were equated. But the constant jockeying for position also enabled the English state to limit the power of their overseas agents by pitting them against one another. Personal rivalries and animosities often played out in the context of the circulation of news and intelligence. Although resident ambassadors were obliged to share intelligence with their colleagues, at times it was in their interest either to withhold information or ensure that they were receiving some reciprocal news or benefit in return.

One of the chief functions of the ambassador and his staff was to manage the flow of information with state officials in England as well as among the nation's newly established network of resident embassies. Much of the daily life of the embassy was therefore devoted to writing,

to maintaining a nearly constant output of intelligence reports. In an example of an embassy's prodigious textual production, one early modern Venetian ambassador sent 472 dispatches in a single year.¹⁵ 'Diplomacy,' as Timothy Hampton points out, 'is thus a political practice that is also a writing practice.'¹⁶ The burdens of writing offset the increasingly bureaucratic terms of diplomatic service and exposed, instead, the personal and intersubjective qualities of the ambassador's role. Diplomatic letters are surprisingly self-referential, and acutely aware of the precariousness of their bureaucratic project: preoccupied with the number of letters lost or delayed; the missing gaps in news and intelligence; the deeply personal resentment stemming from having written more often or more fully than one's correspondent. Carleton, for instance, was frustrated by Wotton's frequent epistolary silences, and described him as 'not affable, always busy, but dispatching little', while their mutual friend and correspondent John Chamberlain, by contrast, complained that Wotton wrote too much, sending him letters every time he received a scrap of news, which produced a stream of overlapping messages that lacked any overarching narrative coherence.¹⁷ As Carleton's professional relationship with Wotton progressively deteriorated, he even considered taking the unprecedented step of ending their correspondence, declaring to Chamberlain, 'Fabritio's correspondence and mine is at present at a stand, for he puts me in expectation of his next, and, in answer, I have referred him to my last; which I mean shall be my last to him.'¹⁸

Wotton retained a degree of agential power by asserting his control over the textual exchanges of information that were channelled through his embassy. When Carleton and Chamberlain mockingly renamed him 'Fabritio', or 'the father of lies', this characterization derived from what they identified as his distinctive modes of writing. As Carleton wrote to Chamberlain, 'The world is much confused in conjecture at Fabritio's late dispatches, which strangers write hither, out of his letters to his friends, [and they] are matters of the greatest moment that ever *Legatus peregre missus*, etc., sent to his prince.'¹⁹ Rather than using his diplomatic correspondence as a depersonalized, instrumental means for conveying news, Wotton ensured that the value of his information was contingent on his own indispensable role as its reporter. Moreover, instead of discretely sending secret intelligence back to England, his writings became more widely distributed, circulating not only between friends and within domestic coterie but also across national boundaries and among foreign readers. It is appropriate that Carleton elsewhere likened Wotton's letters to 'gazettes' (or news-sheets), a comment that

reflects the extent to which the secret writing of diplomacy had entered what Habermas identifies as a chief domain of an emergent early modern public sphere: the transcultural traffic in news.²⁰ Blurring the boundaries of public and private in his writings, Wotton disseminated these documents in order to promote himself and advertise his suitability for other appointments. This degree of publicity undermined the traditional association of diplomacy with secrecy, and the diplomat as a dignified spy, an ironic reversal given Wotton's own personal history as a figure trained in intelligence work.

Over the course of his career, Wotton gained notoriety for making public the secret workings of diplomacy. The most scandalous incident occurred in 1610, when a Catholic polemical writer named Gaspar Scioppius published a statement that Wotton had made years earlier describing the role of the ambassador as that of 'an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country'.²¹ This episode was used to discredit James I's efforts to institute a mode of public diplomacy and cited as evidence of the underlying deceitfulness of English policy. Wotton's infamous pun – *lying* abroad – speaks to two key anxieties relating to the perceived duplicity inherent in diplomatic practice. The first is a spatially defined distinction premised on the assumption that the extraterritorial workings of state power entail a state of exception: when lying abroad, the state's representatives may broadly *lie*. Moreover, states rely on this loophole in order to maintain a policy of plausible deniability toward their own agents, so that an ambassador caught in a lie may be discredited as a rogue agent acting on his own initiative.²² Indeed, the English state treated Wotton precisely in this manner following the scandal. After Wotton was recalled to England, bringing his first embassy to a premature close, he was forced to spend the next six years lobbying at court and accepting temporary assignments until he could regain his post in 1616. Wotton's opponents also used this episode to bar him from any positions in England.²³ Ironically, in relegating him to the suspect space of extraterritorial service, they only confirmed Wotton's assessment of the ambassador's social role.

Wotton's statement also reflected on a second, more fundamental anxiety relating to the duplicity of state power: the intrinsic 'craft' of statecraft. In order for the state to maintain its legitimacy, state authority must be abstracted from the means through which it is maintained. The position of the state as authorizing force is contingent on its separation from the actions of its agents. The theoretical elaboration of sovereignty depends on a kind of sleight of hand: by eliding the practices through which the state is constituted, sovereign authority can be represented as

the prime mover of political agency, the point of origin and legitimacy that may remain unblemished despite the necessary means through which it is maintained. And in order to minimize the significance of the practices of writing and forms of agency that actively constitute the state, diplomatic agents are relegated to an instrumental, bureaucratic status, as cogs in a mechanism that, ostensibly, they can only manage, not control.

In contrast to the modern definition of diplomacy as a 'craft of the state', in the early modern period diplomacy still adhered to its etymological root – the diplomat was a figure defined by his function as the writer of *diplomas*, literally, official documents folded together. Diplomacy, in this sense, offered a competing model of agency – a 'craft of the hand', to use Costas Constantinou's phrasing – one that was constituted through acts of writing and intersubjective means of transmission. The historical foundations of diplomacy as an instrumental component in establishing sovereign authority and maintaining the interstate system stemmed from a key transition at the beginning of the modern era that gave priority to 'the different political styles and effects of political authority and less [importance] to the hand of the scribe and acts of handwriting that produced the material or *diploma*' which formed the content of interstate commerce.²⁴

One of the unique stylistic features of Wotton's diplomatic correspondence is the frequency with which his letters revealed the social contexts of their composition and circulation. In drawing attention to the personal signature of his diplomatic hand, his letters prized not the craftiness of diplomacy but the care intrinsic to the labor of writing – the underlying humanity, in other words, of the bureaucratic project itself, whether in terms of the inescapably personal loyalties or jealousies that motivate public duties or the ways that the all-too-human limits of the writing hand always press against the state's prescribed writing regime. In one instance, he composed a letter to Sir Thomas Edmondes in Brussels in his own hand, presenting the document as a testament to his personal bond to his colleague and as a peace offering to compensate for a recent lapse in his correspondence.²⁵ On other occasions, the absence of his secretary, sent as a messenger for a previous letter, forced Wotton to compose his letter himself.²⁶ Many of his letters presented diplomatic writing as a collaborative process: in the midst of a winter cold spell that he claims had 'benumbed' his secretary's hand, Wotton took over the quill himself.²⁷ Another letter graphically represented the collaborative relations that characterized the embassy, and featured the alternating hands of Wotton and his secretary as they took turns composing the letter.²⁸

Wotton's letters additionally emphasized the social and intersubjective contexts of their circulation by making reference to the messenger bearing the text to its addressee. Many of his letters served a double function: not only transmitting information to court or his diplomatic colleagues, but also acting as a letter of introduction for the bearer, a person who was, in most instances, a young member of Wotton's embassy. When referring to these agents, Wotton described them in terms that blurred the boundaries separating public and professional life from a private, domestic sphere, calling them 'an instrument of mine own' as well as of 'mine own family'.²⁹ Friendship and family provided the affective registers in which social relations among state agents could be imagined. As Foucault notes, this process – of 'governmentality' – is a method that transposes the 'meticulous attention of the father towards his family' and introduces it 'into the management of the state'.³⁰ However, the social dynamics of the embassy disrupted the conventional analogy of family and state. Whereas the extraterritorial status of the embassy was often contingent on efforts to replicate a private, markedly English space abroad, the homosocial dynamics of a household populated by Wotton and his boys attested to the blurred social roles created within the embassy, the codes of sociability and forms of affect that drew on overlapping languages of family, pedagogy, and sexuality.

An embassy is distinguished, of course, by its extraterritoriality – its unique legal position as a protected space lying outside the boundaries of the nation but possessing a sovereign authority of its own.³¹ But the early modern embassy was above all a household, a domestic space of both business and residence, and its social dynamics complicated conventional divisions of public and private spheres. This professional, bureaucratic space was also a domain of friendship and intimacy, one that was marked by the kind of 'audience-oriented subjectivity' that Habermas confines solely to the private realm of the family.³² The embassy's distance from national culture and its models of domesticity facilitated the creation of alternative affective communities, forms of association that are perhaps recognizable now only in terms of their disruption of traditional categories. As Harold Nicolson tellingly observed in his early twentieth-century survey of diplomatic practice, '[e]ven in this country a professional diplomatist is regarded as rather un-English; as a queer cosmopolitan; and so he is'.³³ Reflecting the historical ascendancy of the family as the paradigmatic model for the private realm and centre of emotional life, Nicolson can only represent the intimacies of a public, professional sphere – and its characteristic relations of adoption, surrogacy, and association – as a distinctly queer aesthetic.³⁴

William Leete, Wotton's steward during his second term, described the embassy in the homosocial terms of the literary coterie or domestic college, idealizing it as a space safely removed from the dangers of political life. Writing to Wotton's former chaplain Isaac Bargrave in England, he remarked, 'wee liue happily merrily and honestly, lett state businesses goe as they will, wee followe our studies harde, and loue one another'.³⁵ Leete's comment was perhaps intended to evoke sentiments of nostalgia in Bargrave, not only for the life he had left behind in Venice, but also, it is implied, for the social relations that were no longer available after his return to England. The sociable, studious environment of the embassy was contingent on its extraterritorial distance from domestic culture.

The embassy's cloistered environment also stemmed from its political status in early modern Venice. Venetian law barred the English ambassador and his staff from private meetings with Venetian citizens, thereby relegating them to the sequestered environment that Leete prized so highly. Wotton nonetheless managed to circumvent these restrictions and maintain a remarkably public presence in Venice. Because these laws applied specifically to English members of his embassy, Wotton recruited Venetians into his service, and his embassy was exceptional for its multinational and multilingual personnel. One of Wotton's Italian secretaries, Gregorio de'Monti, in fact served as the *de facto* English ambassador in Venice over the two-year gap between Wotton's second and third terms.³⁶ The statutes that were intended to ensure the national integrity of the embassy, and keep it at a safe distance from Venetian culture, thereby provided the means for creating, instead, a cosmopolitan social space. One of Wotton's chief political aims had an intrinsic social component, as he fostered a project of mentoring Italian Protestant converts with the hope of creating a community who could enter political life and forge ties with England and its allies.³⁷

Since the laws regulating foreign ambassadors' social contacts applied solely within the city, Wotton also eluded restrictions by relocating his embassy outside Venice for periods of time. While he was away – touring the countryside, or settled in a nearby villa – he would leave a secretary, such as the Italian de'Monti, in charge of the embassy. The peripatetic nature of Wotton's embassy confounded his diplomatic colleagues, who were frustrated by their inability to track him down in their correspondence and alarmed that he had seemingly abandoned his post.³⁸ Contradicting Leete's image of a settled domestic space, Wotton's embassy depended on travel and circulation.³⁹ During his extended stays outside of Venice, Wotton concealed his activities by assuming the

role of a fashionable traveller, and he made frequent pronouncements in which he seemingly gave priority to personal leisure over professional duties.⁴⁰ These statements, taken at face value by his colleagues, only fuelled the gossip swirling about him. As Chamberlain snidely noted to Carleton, 'Fabritio', enjoying himself in Venice, 'geves himself *buon tempo*, and followes goode companie, and plays, as familiarly and ordinarilie as yf he had nothing els to do.'⁴¹ But Wotton's sociability, which enabled him to move freely through Italy and mingle with different publics, was instrumental in gathering intelligence as part of his official duties.⁴² He maintained a network of agents throughout Italy, a group he was able to contact more easily when travelling outside of Venice. A large percentage of the embassy's household expenses went to payments for these informants.⁴³ Sociability was a key component in recruiting informants and maintaining intelligence networks, for agents were linked solely to the ambassador who employed them rather than to the English embassy or state more generally. When Carleton took over from Wotton in 1610, he did not inherit Wotton's contacts, and was forced to create his own network of agents.⁴⁴ The central role played by these Italian agents in the domestic business of the embassy reflects the extent to which the embassy blurred not only national boundaries but also demarcations of public and private spheres.

In modern diplomacy, the extraterritorial privileges of the embassy are contingent on its permanence and universally recognized presence as a physical structure, a secure compound possessing a fictional status as national territory on foreign soil. The early modern period was instrumental in giving shape to the extraterritorial rights of the embassy. Indeed, the protection allotted to ambassadorial households was often a point of contention, as with the role of the Spanish embassy in London, which served as a site of sanctuary and religious observance for English Catholics.⁴⁵ The embassy's extraterritorial status inherently defined it as a space that uniquely traversed public and private spheres. But the English embassy in Venice was additionally exceptional in that this household was situated in a rented private home. The household accounts of Wotton's embassy reveal the extent to which it was utterly dependent on its Venetian hosts: not only for the ambassadorial residence itself, but also for household furnishings, transportation, food, and domestic labour, material links that undercut the imputed separateness of the embassy as a distinctly English space. When Wotton had his secretary Isaac Wake compile an inventory of the embassy and its household goods at the end of his first term in 1610, for example, he did so in order to calculate the debts

that he owed to the embassy's landlord, a Venetian Jew named Isaac Luzzati.⁴⁶

In her recent work on the economics of early modern domesticity, Natasha Korda has argued that a recognizably modern subject began to emerge in the early modern period in part by separating the individual from the world of objects – or 'household stuff' – associated with domestic spaces.⁴⁷ Wake's inventory, by contrast, illustrates the extent to which the ambassador – the subject of diplomacy – occupied a relatively marginal role in the embassy household. Most of the embassy's fifteen rooms were reserved for staff and domestic labourers, with relatively little space set apart for the ambassador himself.⁴⁸ The paucity of expensive domestic commodities, and the number of relatively austere rooms occupied by the embassy's staff of young men, all contributed to a material sense of the embassy as resembling more a college residence than an aristocratic home or state office.

In his tenure in Venice from 1610–16, Carleton attempted to secure a more permanent domestic arrangement for the embassy. His own household accounts detail his shopping spree, listing £1200 spent on 'new furnishing my house' alongside separate expenses for his wife amounting to £326.⁴⁹ Carleton's embassy acquired a sense of permanence as it accrued the conventional markers of domesticity: not only luxury items and domestic property, but also the recognizable propriety of the familial unit inhabiting this social space. Carleton took a great deal of pride in his efforts to improve the embassy and, when Wotton succeeded him as ambassador, was insistent that his colleague remain on in the new home, despite their personal differences.⁵⁰ Domestic concerns dominate the correspondence relating to the transition from Carleton's embassy to Wotton's second term in Venice. Two years prior to his departure, Carleton complained to Chamberlain that Wotton 'doth somewhat confound me here in that he writes nothing about his house', that is, his domestic arrangements and needs.⁵¹ Indeed, the priority given to domestic issues is reflected in the fact that Wotton's first letter to the Chief Secretary after his return to Venice was devoted entirely to explaining why he had chosen his own residence instead.⁵² Wotton neglected to inform Carleton of his decision until several months later, however, when he casually explained that he rejected the house 'not so much for the greatness of the rent . . . as for the farness from the *piazze*'.⁵³

Even years later this episode would remain a point of contention between them. After Wotton resumed his post in Venice for a third and final term, he took particular delight in informing Carleton of the

expensive renovations that he was making to another new residence, efforts that claimed precedence over relaying intelligence to his colleague: 'These silent days have been spent in the trimming of my house, wherein the rooms of receipt are so vast that I had rather have rigged one of the King's ships.'⁵⁴ Punning on the ever-contentious issue of household accounts, Wotton concluded his perfunctory letter by icily assuring him that it 'was but to give your Lordship an accompt of my movings and the rest, wherein after this there shall be silence between us'.⁵⁵ Just as Wotton had earlier declared his autonomy by refusing the recently and expensively furnished home that Carleton had left for him, in this parting shot he extended their rivalry into the domestic sphere, emphasizing the extent to which he surpassed Carleton's earlier accomplishments in furnishing the ambassadorial household.

In his analysis of commodity culture, Arjun Appadurai refers to the 'social life of things' to describe the paths in which objects travel and accrue social value.⁵⁶ Diplomatic correspondence provided a medium for the exchange of a variety of commodities: not only a traffic in news and intelligence, but also a circulation of material goods, a network of exchange that encompassed the human subjects responsible for these objects' transmission. In analysing Wotton's correspondence, it is essential to foreground the intersubjective contexts which transmitted – and also transformed – the content of these documents. As Alan Stewart has argued in his discussion of early modern letters, '[t]hese objects contain text, certainly, but the message they convey is not primarily about that text, but about from whom they come, to whom they go, and how they make that journey'.⁵⁷ Affect, sociability, and intimacy were key factors that dictated what could enter the text of the diplomatic letter itself. In a letter to Secretary Calvert, for instance, Wotton opted to leave out any details concerning his recent journey to Venice, and instead had his servant James Varie deliver both the letter along with the omitted narration.⁵⁸ In other examples, the object of the letter and the person of its bearer became interchangeable in the process of circulation. In a letter to Sir Ralph Winwood, Wotton offered him not only news from The Hague, but also his servant Giovanni Biondi: 'I will now deliver him unto your honourable hands.'⁵⁹ It is only appropriate that Wotton elsewhere referred to Carleton's secretary Isaac Wake as 'a living *gazzetta* of this Court'.⁶⁰ Wake, who would go on to have a distinguished diplomatic career, began his professional training by entering circuits of patronage in his role as a messenger. In the process, he forged a professional identity by assimilating himself to the workings of intelligence, even to the point of personifying the transmission of information.

The extent to which the diplomatic letter was shaped by its social meanings and material qualities is reflected in a packet that Wotton sent to King James, Prince Henry, and Secretary Cecil in June 1609. The referential content of the letters, updates of news from Venice, is perhaps the least significant aspect of these documents. Instead, the texts drew attention to the importance of their bearer, Wotton's nephew Albertus Morton, and each served as a letter of introduction on his behalf. The letters also functioned as components in a circuit of gift exchange, with Wotton conferring coded presents that appealed to each of his addressees. For Cecil, he offered a mosaic portrait of the Secretary, a gift intended to be transmitted from his protégé, Morton, to Salisbury's son, thereby ceremoniously extending bonds of patronage and alliance to the next generation.⁶¹ For James, Wotton sent what seems on the surface to have been a gag gift, or a 'strange relic', as he jokingly described it: the Earl of Gowrie's coat of arms, taken from a dancing school in Padua where Gowrie had stayed years before.⁶² As with the Italian mosaic, the gift advertised the reach of Wotton's material access and political influence within Italy.⁶³ But, more significantly, it also offered a coded reference to a specific personal context. The two had first met in 1601, when Wotton was sent to Scotland by Duke Ferdinand of Tuscany in order to warn James of a possible assassination attempt. Wotton had disguised himself as an Italian named Ottavio Baldi during his journey, and he famously revealed his identity and mission only once he had gained a private audience with the King. Throughout their correspondence, Wotton would often sign his letters 'Ottavio Baldi', not only reminding his monarch of his loyal history of service, but also accentuating the intimacies of political alliance, the forging and preserving of bonds through secrecy and concealment.⁶⁴ The coat of arms of Gowrie, the thwarted assassin, along with the signature of his alias Baldi, thus evoked a shared history of dangers averted, one that implicitly extended to the most recent of foiled conspiracies, the Gunpowder Plot.

Through these gifts, Wotton stressed the continued relevance of a diplomatic identity grounded on a politics of friendship, an ethos that was becoming increasingly strained in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot. The extent to which this event had transformed the diplomatic culture of early modern England is illustrated most clearly by an episode in which the English state circumvented diplomatic protocol and international law in pressing for the arrest and extradition of a group of Catholics exiles who were, in fact, unconnected to the plot.⁶⁵ In a programme spearheaded by the Earl of Salisbury, and implemented by ambassadors

Cornwallis in Madrid and Edmondes in Brussels, this state of emergency provided the pretext for a chilling innovation: a defence of the English state's authority to unilaterally assert its sovereignty beyond its territorial boundaries, and juridically enforce its authority over its expatriated subjects, regardless of legal precedent or international law. Significantly, Wotton was left out of the loop in these efforts.⁶⁶ One could draw on his marginal role at this critical moment so as to reinforce the view of Wotton as more of a literary figure than a statesman. But, in conclusion, I want to argue things differently. It is very easy to see Wotton, along with his diplomatic style, as being pushed aside out of political necessity. On the contrary, however, he took an active role in the English state's response to the Gunpowder Plot. But for him, the event demanded a legal and intellectual response, and it was Wotton who was responsible for arguing England's case to a European constituency. Alone among his colleagues, he presented copies of James's defence of the Oath of Allegiance to European states.⁶⁷ And he also intensified his activist efforts to counter the imputed threat of an alliance of English Catholic exiles with European states by engaging in a battle of ideas: disseminating polemical literature, mentoring Italian converts to Protestantism, even proposing to establish Protestant seminaries on the Continent. These efforts did not produce much in the way of policy or material results, and, as a consequence, the later stages of Wotton's career were marked by a growing sense of frustration and failure. As he complained during his inconclusive 1615 mission to Cleves, an initial flashpoint for the Thirty Years' War, 'for what sin, in the name of Christ, was I sent hither among soldiers, being by my profession academical, and by my charge pacifical?'⁶⁸

Yet even in a political climate increasingly hostile to the politics of friendship he endorsed, Wotton nonetheless stubbornly adhered to his alternative model of diplomatic relations and refused to subscribe to a view of diplomacy that primarily saw itself as war by other, political means. Wotton had famously defined the role of the ambassador as that of 'an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country'. His career demonstrates that this degree of agency could be exercised not only on behalf of the state, but also against it: 'All States are ungrateful', he confided to members of his embassy, but then too 'so [are] their ministers.'⁶⁹ The terms of his dissent were not direct, but instead expressed by contesting the characteristically abstracted terms in which state power is defined at those moments when sovereign authority is abused. As Wotton remarked in the final year of his final embassy, 'as to his Majesty doth belong the sovereignty of judgement, so to his poor

honest creatures abroad, the liberty of relation, and a franker discharge of our zeal and duties'.⁷⁰

Notes and references

1. See Daniela Frigo (2000) ed., *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Douglas Biow (2002) *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Timothy Hampton (2009) *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); and the essays collected in the special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Spring 2008, ed. John Watkins.
2. John Watkins (2008) 'Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, 1.
3. James Der Derian (1987) *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 112.
4. Qtd. in Costas M. Constantinou (1996) *On the Way to Diplomacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 50.
5. Der Derian, p. 114.
6. Lynne Magnusson (1999) *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 92.
7. M.S. Anderson (1993) *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy 1450–1919* (London: Longman), p. 11.
8. Logan Pearsall Smith (1907) ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon), vol. 1, p. 176.
9. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 99–101.
10. Daniela Frigo (2008) 'Prudence and Experience: Ambassadors and Political Culture in Early Modern Italy', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, 16.
11. Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne (1995) *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 33.
12. Smith, vol. 2, p. 213.
13. Laurie Shannon (2002) *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
14. Smith, vol. 1, p. 319.
15. Hamilton and Langhorne, p. 33.
16. Hampton, p. 7.
17. John Chamberlain (1939) *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2 vols., ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society), vol. 2, p. 84.
18. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series . . . 1611–1618* (1858; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967), p. 270.
19. Dudley Carleton (1972) *Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain, 1603–1624*, ed. Maurice Lee, Jr. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), p. 240.
20. Carleton, p. 235. For Habermas's discussion, see *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 15–16.

21. *Reliquiae Wottonianae* (London, 1651), p. 21 and pp. 400–5 and Smith, vol. 1, p. 49 and vol. 1, p. 127.
22. Constantinou, p. 86. For Wotton's 1610 visit to the French court, Salisbury refused to give him specific instructions in writing that could implicate the English state (National Archives, SP 78/56/245v).
23. In the interim, Wotton served as English emissary on a mission to Turin (1612) and during negotiations of the Juliers–Cleves dispute (1614–15).
24. Constantinou, p. 80.
25. British Library, Stowe MS 169, f. 3.
26. Stowe MSS 169, f. 185 and 170, ff. 61–2v.
27. Stowe MS 169, f. 245v.
28. Stowe MS 170, ff. 155–6. My discussion is indebted to Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 233–78.
29. Smith, vol. 1, pp. 325–6.
30. Foucault (1991) 'Governmentality', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 92.
31. See E.R. Adair (1929) *The Extraterritoriality of Ambassadors in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Longmans).
32. Habermas, pp. 28, 43–51.
33. Harold Nicolson (1954) *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method* (New York: Macmillan), p. 35.
34. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 146.
35. *Letters and Dispatches from Sir Henry Wotton to James I and his Ministers, in the Years [1617–20]* (London: William Nicol, 1850), p. 48. Wotton similarly described his embassy as 'my domestic college' (Smith, vol. 2, p. 204; cf. vol. 2, p. 365).
36. Smith, vol. 2, pp. 473–4.
37. Smith, vol. 1, p. 76. Wotton pursued this program on his own initiative and without the support of James I (Smith, vol. 1, pp. 84, 89).
38. Among references to Wotton's travels from his post in Venice, see Stowe MSS 169, f. 97v and 171, f. 63.
39. On the additional embassy expenses stemming from the costs of Wotton travelling with his 'family' of retainers, see SP 99/25/161 and Chamberlain, vol. 2, p. 308.
40. Stowe MSS 169, f. 139 and 171, f. 43.
41. Chamberlain, vol. 1, p. 382.
42. At other times, particularly during short-term extraordinary embassies, Wotton prolonged his travel or extended his mission as a way of ensuring that he continued to be paid until he acquired another post (Chamberlain, vol. 1, pp. 379, 565, 569, and 617).
43. Among references to payments for intelligence gathering, see SP 99/23/127 and 99/20/224, 232.
44. Intelligence letters from Carleton's Italian agents are collected in SP 99/20 and 99/24.
45. Garrett Mattingly (1962) *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 280.
46. Smith, vol. 1, p. 501n.
47. Natasha Korda (2002) *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 1–14.
48. SP 99/6/209–15.
49. SP 99/20/132–2v. The amount spent on furnishing Carleton's residence far surpassed any other expense related to the embassy (f. 131).
50. Carleton, p. 168.
51. Carleton, p. 168.
52. Smith, vol. 2, p. 96.
53. Smith, vol. 2, p. 101.
54. Smith, vol. 2, pp. 208–9. In a letter to Carleton near the beginning of his second embassy in 1617, Wotton was much more apologetic of the fact that 'domestique' business, including a recent change in residence, had resulted in 'a slighter returne of intelligence' (SP 84/79/43).
55. Smith, vol. 2, p. 209.
56. See Arjun Appadurai (1986) ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
57. Alan Stewart (2008) *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 23.
58. Smith, vol. 2, p. 207.
59. Smith, vol. 2, p. 80.
60. Smith, vol. 2, p. 14.
61. Smith, vol. 1, p. 457, 459, 460.
62. Smith, vol. 1, p. 458.
63. Melanie Ord (2007a) discusses Wotton's role as a collector, as well as his later career at Eton, in 'Returning from Venice to England: Sir Henry Wotton as Diplomat, Pedagogue and Italian Cultural Connoisseur', *Borders and Travellers in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Thomas Betteridge (Burlington, VT: Ashgate), pp. 147–67.
64. Among other examples, see Smith, vol. 1, p. 383 and vol. 2, p. 53.
65. Mark Netzloff (forthcoming 2011), 'Catholic Exiles and the English State After the Gunpowder Plot', *Reformation 15*, special issue on 'Exile and Religious Identity in Early Modern Britain and Ireland', ed. Christopher Highley.
66. For Wotton's comments on the case, see Stowe MS 170, f. 237.
67. These presentation copies were, nonetheless, subsequently ignored and even banned: see Smith, vol. 1, pp. 416, 465, 467, 468n, and 469, as well as Melanie Ord (2007b) 'Venice and Rome in the Addresses and Dispatches of Sir Henry Wotton: First English Embassy to Venice, 1604–1610', *The Seventeenth Century 22*, 11–12.
68. Smith, vol. 2, pp. 81–2.
69. Smith, vol. 2, p. 492.
70. Smith, vol. 2, p. 226.