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DIPLOMATIC PERSONAE: TORQUATO TASSO ON THE AMBASSADOR

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Abstract

This article examines Torquato Tasso's *Il Messaggiero* [The Messenger] (1582), by focusing on the political subject matter, as discussed in the final part of the text through an imaginary dialogue, that is, the figure of the ambassador, the framework of his office and its relationship with power. Tasso's dialogue features the nature of the ambassador as a figure incarnating his own 'self', while simultaneously representing his prince and acting on his own behalf within a specific political context, an external dimension, namely, the 'international'. Such a condition of alienation is one of the origins of the office's 'conflicting obligations' toward the prince and toward its conciliatory function. We should indeed discuss the diplomatic personae or a divided persona. Tasso rejects the concept of the ambassador as a mere executor of policy, which is a striking departure from the previous general conception of the ambassador. The paradoxical conclusion that emerges is that the messenger, or the ambassador, is *not* a simple messenger. Tasso's text and its context is the article's epicentre. However, this article concerns the possible links between certain ideas and discourses regarding the ambassador's persona and the growth of diplomacy as a part of the rise of the 'international'.

It has been noted that 'foundations of modern international thought were fashioned in diverse disciplinary and vernacular languages at different rhythms and speeds and on different vectors'.[1] This article examines the value of Torquato Tasso's *Il Messaggiero* [The Messenger], by focusing on its political subject matter as discussed in its final part through an imaginary dialogue: the figure of the ambassador, the framework of his office and its relationship with power.[2] In general, the article concerns the possible links between certain ideas and discourses regarding the ambassador's persona, the growth of diplomatic thought, and the rise of diplomacy

[1] Richard Devetak, 'Historiographical Foundations of Modern International Thought: Histories of the European States-System from Florence to Göttingen', *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 1 (2015): 64.

[2] Torquato Tasso, *Il Messaggiero. Dialogo del Signor Torquato Tasso* (Venice: Bertrando Giunti e fratelli, 1582). As far as I know, *Il Messaggiero* has never been translated into English. *Tasso's Dialogues: A Selection with the Discourse on the Art of the Dialogue*, trans. Cames Lord and Dain A. Trafton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), does not include *Il Messaggiero*. I include quotations from Torquato Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, in Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, ed. Bruno Basile (Milan: Mursia, 1991), 33-104, where the 'diplomatic' part of the text ranges from page 88 to page 104, or paragraphs 193-262. For a historical, philological and literary analysis of the text in the entire context of Tasso's *dialoghi*, see the critical edition by Ezio Raimondi, Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, 3 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1958). Cf. also, *I Dialoghi di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Cesare Guasti, 3 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1858); Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi Scelti*, ed. Gustavo Rodolfo (Milan: C. Signorelli, 1930); Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, ed. Ettore Mazziali, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1976).

as a part of the rise of the 'international'.[3] In particular, an analysis of Tasso's text and its context is the epicentre of this article.

It must be noted that *Il Messaggiero* is one of the earliest exemplars of the literary tradition of the 'perfect' ambassador.[4] Therefore, it provides an early perception of the 'international' as a distinct dimension of politics with the ambassador as one of its central figures. We know that this assumption is not always valid for the culture and political praxis of the Renaissance and the *ancien régime*.[5] Tasso's dialogue is, in fact, an innovative text. Its concept of the diplomatic persona and the ambassador's role is precisely one of the most intriguing aspects of *Il Messaggiero*.[6] Tasso rejects the concept of the ambassador as a mere executor of policy, which is a striking departure from the previous general conception of the ambassador. In his view, the messenger is not just a messenger. We may say that, for Tasso, the ambassadors were already 'a species *apart*' – to quote Stendhal's definition.[7] His conception tends to consider the diplomatic function as a central element of the 'international', thus, supporting the institutional evolution of diplomacy as a distinct symbolic complex within the sphere of politics and culture. It is, above all, a form of knowledge, or a fundamental matrix of the modern political rationality.

Set within this framework, the article also draws attention to an interesting aspect of diplomacy, namely, that studying literary representations of the ambassador may generate a new outlook on the question of diplomacy and alienation.[8] Therefore, the article explores the ambassador's fluid identity and the complex relationship between the diplomat and the 'self'.[9] In this sense, this study may encourage further research into the links between the 'international' and the alienation of the state and the self. This may be an interesting area of research because

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[3] 'The word *international*, it must be acknowledged, is a new one; though, it is hoped, sufficiently analogous and intelligible. It is calculated to express, in a more significant way, the branch of law which goes commonly under the name of the *law of nations*'; Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 296. I use the word indiscriminately, while remaining conscious of the problem of anachronism.

[4] Raimondi noted that 'in a sense, it composed a dyptich' with Tasso's *Il Gonzaga, overo Del piacere onesto*; Ezio Raimondi, 'Introduzione', in Tasso, *Dialoghi*, 23.

[5] *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy. The Structure of Diplomatic Practice 1450-1800*, ed. Daniela Frigo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

[6] Using the concept of diplomatic persona, I draw particular inspiration from Ian Hunter, 'The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher', *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 571-600.

[7] 'Les ambassadeurs sont une espèce à part, marquée par des singularités très tranchées, et ces singularités sont encore rehaussées par la situation et le caractère personnel et politique du souverain qui les envoie ou qui les reçoit'. Stendhal, *Pages d'Italie* (Paris: Le Divan, 1932), 294.

[8] On diplomacy and the concept of alienation, see James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987). The volume is not confined to diplomacy in the conventional sense, to say the least.

[9] Representations of the ambassador's fluid identity, and the relationship between the diplomat and the self emerges in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace*, ed. Nathalie Rivère de Carles (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

studies of alienation have traditionally been concerned with issues that have emerged within, and not between, states.

Tasso's dialogue features the unique nature of the ambassador as a figure incarnating his own self, while simultaneously representing his prince and acting on his behalf within a specific political context, an external dimension, namely, the 'international'.[10] In Tasso's view, this peculiarity has a complex structure. It makes the diplomatic persona a key figure through which to reflect on the nature of the modern self and the human conduct in a divided world. In this sense, the persona of the ambassador is understood as a special kind of self, cultivated by a member of the European elite as the means of bearing 'international' understanding. For Tasso, the diplomat's dual persona gave him the opportunity to dissimulate and manipulate, at times deflecting the lines of authority and power. As we shall see, such a condition is one of the origins of the office's 'conflicting obligations' both toward the prince and toward its conciliatory function.[11] Moreover, the article shows that this conflict is acknowledged, but not resolved.

We should indeed talk about the diplomatic personae as a divided persona. I argue that it is this duality that, in Tasso's view, creates a political space for the ambassador's relatively autonomous role and active action.[12] This possibility is fundamentally based on his capacity to use the art of the word, that is, the art of diplomacy. The space increases in proportion to this capacity as well as other specific qualities. The ambassador is the individual who has become an emblematic and operative component of diplomacy. He has embodied, as much as any other crucial political figure, the fictional character of a person with special qualities. But contrary to any other figure, those representational qualities are correlated with an external role, not a

[10] I will be using the masculine pronoun throughout the paper because the earliest ambassadors were generally men and texts make few references to women diplomats, with perhaps the exception of Renée de Guébriant's 1645 mission; cf. Gemma Allen, 'The Rise of the Ambassadress: English Ambassadorial Wives and Early Modern Diplomatic Culture', *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (2018): 617-638. If the practice of establishing resident embassies was first adopted in the Italian peninsula in the fifteenth century, then it should be noted that the first female ambassador, Barbara Para, Ambassador of San Marino to Italy, was appointed almost six century later in 1992; cf. *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, serie generale, no. 296 (1992), 33. Alexandra Kollontai was appointed Soviet ambassador to Sweden in 1932, and she is often considered the first woman ambassador of the modern era. However, in November 1918 Rosika Schwimmer was appointed as Hungarian minister to Switzerland by Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi, reportedly the first woman 'ambassador' of the modern age; cf. *Notable American Women. A Biographical Dictionary, 1607-1950 – Volume 3*, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 248.

[11] I am indebted to Ian Hunter, 'Conflicting Obligations: Pufendorf, Leibniz and Barbeyrac on Civil Authority', *History of Political Thought* 25, no. 4 (2004): 670-699.

[12] Gentili contests Tasso's concept in his *De Legationibus Libri Tres* (Londini: Excudebat Thomas Vautrollerius, 1585), 125-127. Comparing Tasso and Gentili on diplomacy, Pirillo concludes that 'for Tasso the diplomat had no autonomy with regard to his own sovereign, and must agree with him in every choice'; Diego Pirillo, 'Tasso at the French Embassy: Epic, Diplomacy, and the Law of Nations', in *Authority and Diplomacy from Dante to Shakespeare*, eds. Jason Powell and William Rositer, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 146. See also Diego Pirillo, *The Refugee-Diplomat: Venice, England, and the Reformation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), chap. 5.

domestic one. In other words, they have been gradually defined by the rise of the 'international', the growing awareness of a specific dimension of political affairs.[13]

We begin our exploration by outlining the subject and context of *Il Messaggiero*.

1. *Il Messaggiero*: Its Subject and Context

'The authority of Tasso will not serve your purpose, respected Signor Podestà', said Count Attilio in Alessandro Manzoni's historical novel *Promessi Sposi,* which was greatly admired by Edgard Allan Poe. Their heated discussion on the diplomatic persona reaches its climax shortly after: 'To beat an ambassador! – a man whose person is sacred!'; and 'an ambassador is, in his nature, inviolable by the law of nations, *jure gentium*'.[14] Tasso was a figure that was greatly admired by posterity and many of his contemporaries, including Elizabeth of England. She spoke Italian almost as well as a native and, around 1583-1584, she enquired 'whether the unfortunate Tasso' was 'still composing anything, or not'.[15] *Il Messaggiero* was written around February 1580 during Tasso's first year of confinement in Sant'Anna hospice in Ferrara, which greatly impressed Eugène Delacroix, Montaigne as well as Baudelaire.[16] Then, it was published in Venice in 1582 with a dedication to Vincenzo Gonzaga, Prince of Mantua.

What has been said about one of Tasso's explicit political texts can also be said of this specific text: it is striking due to its penetrative power.[17] As a product of literary scholarship and political thinking, as well as factual experience in European courts, this dialogic text in prose includes a dense discussion on the aspirations and contradictions of a distinctly modern, European persona:

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[13] See *inter alia* Stefano Andretta, Stéphane Péquinot and Jean Claude Waquet, *De l'ambassadeur. Les écrits relatifs à l'ambassadeur et à l'art de négocier du Moyen Age au début du XIX siècle* (Rome: Publications de l'École Française de Rome Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X, 2015); Maurizio Bazzoli, *Stagioni e teorie della società internazionale* (Milan: LED Edizioni, 2005), esp. pp. 215-267; Stefano Andretta, *L'arte della prudenza. Teorie e prassi della diplomazia nell'Italia del XVI e XVII secolo* (Rome: Biblink, 2006). Cf. Paolo Prodi, *Diplomazia del Cinquecento. Istituzioni e prassi* (Bologna: Patron, 1963).

[14] Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi (The Betrothed)* (New York: Collier & Son – Harvard Classics, 1909), 78, 79.

[15] Cf. Carlo Bajetta, *Elizabeth I's Italian Letters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2017), xxiii. On Tasso's life see esp. Giovan Battista Manso, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Bruno Basile (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1995 (1621)); Angelo Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, 3 vols. (Rome-Turin: Loescher, 1895 (1785)); and Claudio Gentile, *Tasso* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2007).

[16] Cf. Charles Baudelaire, *Sur le Tasse en Prison d'Eugène Delacroix*, in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Épaves* (Amsterdam: À l'enseigne du Coq, 1866), 113-14. There has been much controversy as to whether Montaigne visited Tasso in the prison hospital in Ferrara; cf. Angelo Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso – Volume 1*, 324-335, and more recently Ayesha Ramachandran, 'Montaigne's Tasso. Madness, Melancholy and the Enigma of Italy', *Forum Italicum* 47, no. 2 (2013): 246-262.

[17] Luigi Firpo, 'Introduzione', in Torquato Tasso, *Tre Scritti Politici*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin: UTET, 1980), 77. The text is the *Discorso intorno alla sedizione nata nel regno di Francia* (1585) [*Discourse on the Sedition arose in the Kingdom of France*].

the resident ambassador.[18] If Tasso's *Liberata* impressed figures such as Goethe and Byron as well as Milton and Spenser, his *Messaggiero* left its mark on political authors from Gentili and Wicquefort, to De Vera and Warszewicki. Reminiscent of the Venetian school of diplomacy, it possesses an archetypal value for diplomatic theory.[19]

However, in 1785 Tasso's biographer noted that *Il Messaggiero* 'incidentally' concerns the office of the ambassador.[20] He would have been one of the relatively few writers who explicitly referred to the final part of *Il Messaggiero.* In fact, it is the main part of the dialogue that has attracted the greatest interest in literature studies devoted to Tasso's *Dialoghi*.[21] But it is in the final part that Tasso's erudite conversation on cosmology gives way to a discussion with a celestial messenger about diplomacy and the human ambassador, or '*l'umano ambasciatore*'.

If we can define this text as being 'incidental', it is only because it accompanies the larger part of *Il Messaggiero*.[22] Actually, it conveys both the ideal and the reality of a nascent diplomatic persona seen from the perspective of a great, troubled humanist. It offers a view of a controversial political figure as seen through the eyes of an ingenious and troubled man of letters. Tasso was himself dreaming of becoming a diplomat without having any real chance of becoming one. In March 1590, he was fantasizing about the idea that 'he [Vincenzo Gonzaga] was thinking ... of making me his resident ambassador to Rome'.[23] In a preceding letter he pointed out the fact that 'I did that dialogue [*Il Messaggiero*] ... to obey a prince's sign'.[24]

We do not know which sign Tasso was obeying. Perhaps he was alluding to Gonzaga's visit during his imprisonment in Ferrara in 1579. What we do know is that he was writing from a place where the modern practice of establishing resident embassies was established in the

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[18] The absence of the ambassador from Eugenio Garin's pantheon of Renaissance characters is a dazzling emblem of Martin Wight's respectable comment: 'Is it more interesting that so many great minds have been drawn, at the margin of their activities, to consider basic problems of international politics, or that more great minds have not been drawn to make these problems their central interest?'; Martin Wight, 'Why is There no International Theory?', *International Relations* 35, no. 2 (1960): 37. Cf. *Renaissance Characters*, Eugenio Garin ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[19] Daniela Frigo, 'Prudenza politica e conoscenza del mondo', 24, 27.

[20] Piernatonio Serassi, *La vita di Torquato Tasso – Volume 2*, ed. C. Guasti (Florence: Barbera, Bianchi e Comp., 1858), 53.

[21] One of the recent brilliant examples of an extremely long tradition, to be quoted here, is Massimo Rossi, *Io come filosofo era stato dubbio. La retorica dei "Dialoghi" di Tasso* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 30, where the *Dialoghi* are considered to be a 'pretext' for 'the construction of rhetorical machines and literary organisms' and, therefore, 'have no interest for the history of ideas'.

[22] As far as I know, the only study integrally devoted to this part of Tasso's text is Dante Fedele, 'Uno scritto sull'ambasciatore del secondo Cinquecento. *Il Messaggiero* di Torquato Tasso', *Il Pensiero Politico* 51, no. 1 (2018): 113-125.

[23] Torquato Tasso, *Le lettere di Torquato Tasso – Volume 4*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1854), letter no. 1235, 302. He was writing to his confident, Antonio Constantini, in Mantua in March 1590.

[24] Tasso to Maurizio Cataneo in Rome, 30 December 1585; Torquato Tasso, *Le lettere di Torquato Tasso – Volume 2*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1853), letter no. 456, 478.

fifteenth century and developed in his own time.[25] By the twelfth century, Italy was organized into a distinctive pattern of political authorities. 'Only in north and central Italy did autonomous political entities, the geographically compact city-states, emerge *comparatively free* of continuous restrictions imposed by an otherwise engaged German empire, the Holy Roman Empire'; therefore, they 'established for themselves, on the basis of customary practices, their independent, *de facto* autonomy in matters of self-governance'.[26] Among the smaller Italian 'states', Ferrara and Mantua were the most highly integrated into the European network of powers during the transition and collapse of the Italian system of polities and powers under pressure from France, Spain, and the Empire.[27] The constant conflicts between Italian courts and their princes reached great heights, but the cultural and institutional forms, which originated in that historical context, have had an undisputable value beyond Italy.[28] The concept of a group of people who are engaged in permanent diplomatic activity, namely the ambassadors, is a leading example, and this is Tasso's implicit theme.

What matters most is that the Italian-initiated practice of establishing permanent, that is, resident embassies in capital cities is a crucial quality that distinguishes modern diplomacy from the *ad hoc* diplomacy of earlier periods.[29] As Garrett Mattingly wrote, 'diplomacy in the modern style, permanent diplomacy, was one of the creations of the Italian Renaissance. It began in the same period that saw the beginnings of the new Italian style of classical scholarship' and 'its full triumph coincided with the full triumph of the new humanism and the new arts'.[30] From this

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[25] Garrett Mattingly, 'The First Resident Embassies: Mediaeval Italian Origins of Modern Diplomacy', *Speculum* 12, no. 4 (1937): 423-439. The pioneeristic treaty on the Venetian resident ambassador by Ermolao Barbaro (1489) is mentioned by Tasso which, however, did not have the possibility to read it ('*ne le mie mani non è pervenuto*'); see Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 89. Cf. Ermolao Barbaro, *Tractatus «De Coelibatu» et «De Officio Legati»*, ed. Vittorio Branca (Florence: Olschki, 1969). See also, Luigi Robuschi, 'Il De Officio Legati di Ermolao Barbaro ed il Pensiero Politico nella Venezia di Fine '400', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 152, (2013-2014): 257-301.
[26] Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 200.
[27] Cf. Daniela Frigo, 'Il Rinascimento e le Corti: Ferrara e Mantova', in *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa – Volume 1*, eds. Giovanni L. Fontana and Luca Mollà, (Costabissara: Angelo Colla Editore, 2005), 314. For a critical evaluation of the smaller Italian states in the Renaissance, that is, other than Naples, Rome, Venice, Milan see, in the same volume, Giovanni Tocci, 'Il Rinascimento in provincia', 387-413.
[28] Cf. Amedeo Quondam, *Questo povero cortegiano. Castiglione, il libro, la storia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), 334.
[29] In saying that, we do not necessarily need to assume the periodisation and narrative positions on the history of early modern diplomacy inherited from, *inter alia*, Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955); Donald Queller, *The Office of the Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Matthew Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919* (London: Longman, 1993); *L'Invention de la Diplomatie. Moyen Age-Temps modernes*, ed. Lucien Bely (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998); or Lucien Bely, *L'Art de la Paix en Europe. Naissance de la Diplomatie Moderne, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007). For a discussion, see Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Catherine Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome. The Rise of the Resident Ambassador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Dante Fedele, *Naissance de la diplomatie moderne (XIIIe-XVIIe Siècles). L'ambassadeur au croisement du droit, de l'éthique et de la politique* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2017).
[30] Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 47.

perspective, Tasso's *Messaggiero* is not just one of the earlier examples of 'diplomatic humanism' but it stands as an exceptional literary reflection on the rise of the 'international'. Remarkably, it reveals a specific concept of the diplomacy of the man of letters in the late sixteenth-century. In this way, the ambassador now gains new political and personal functions in Tasso's thought. As an institution, the real ambassador is a public figure.

2. The 'real' ambassador

If the growth of diplomacy is crucially related to the creation of an innovative and fundamental human figure, such as a resident ambassador, then Tasso's concept of the ambassador possesses a special quality with a clear implication for the history of European ideas. The obvious reason is that conceiving this new diplomatic persona was essential for the 'international' and a prerequisite for any subsequent elaboration of diplomacy as an efficient institution. 'The *resident ambassador*, reciprocally recognized, is the unique invention which has allowed the Western states-system to develop a suppleness and complexity hitherto unknown'.[31] Tasso's text is a contribution to this process, providing an example through which the modern political imagination began to differentiate more systematically among diplomatic figures.

In fact, Tasso sharply distinguishes between ambassadors and non-ambassadors. First of all, the name of the ambassador is to be reserved for public figures only. Persons who are sent from princes to private individuals, as well as from individuals to princes, do not deserve that name which Tasso is using in its modern sense, in place of *legato* or *orator*. They are false ambassadors. But the ambassadors are not just a species apart. There are two species of 'real and noble ambassadors' [*veri e nobili ambasciatori*] among these public figures, according to their different functions. One species is composed of individuals who can negotiate political issues, the other includes individuals who are sent for various demonstrations of benevolence. The first group has an effective negotiating authority, while the second group is not entrusted with the capacity to negotiate. The ambassadors who reside with foreign princes are the sole figures who incarnate both of these functions, acting with full and permanent authority in all diplomatic matters. Time is a crucial element that defines the resident ambassador, that is, 'an ambassador the time for whose departure is not dependent on the conclusion of any particular negotiation'.[32]

[31] Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, ed. H. Bull (Leicester: Leicester University Press in association with LSE, 1977), 30.
[32] Mattingly, 'The First Resident Embassies', 427.

Invested with the full power of autonomous action on behalf of their princes, resident ambassadors correspond to diplomatic plenipotentiaries. For Tasso, these are the ambassadors *par excellence*.[33] At this point in his dialogue, Tasso is already conceptualising the ambassador's universal role.

3. The Ambassador's Universal Role

By universal, Tasso means applicable to all cases. Discussing the ambassador's role, he repeats this adjective,[34] but not for the purpose of introducing an idealized figure. On the contrary, it is a sort of methodological warning because the different cases that can concern the ambassador's role are, in his mind, potentially infinite, as seen in the following, 'thus I estimate that it is almost impossible to derive an art'.[35] The analogy with the orator – a venerated figure – is a calculated choice to resolve this issue. It will suffice to say that this move allowed Tasso to introduce a discussion based on the functional demands of government, the 'sense of statecraft' [*il senno per governare*], and not on 'the science of natural or supernatural things'.[36] He wanted to discuss a set of principles on which the practice of diplomacy is based, and to justify a course of possible action. Tasso's reflection on diplomacy has, therefore, a practical orientation, at least in his intention, because 'we gladly contemplate in order to be more apt to operate'.[37] He insists that his main interest is not to produce an ideal image of the perfect ambassador, which is a common theme in the literature of his time and beyond, but to understand, first of all, the role of the ambassador. Therefore, he wants to discuss the skill in doing the diplomat's craft.

Tasso starts his reflection by noting a basic, common skill between the angel and the diplomat, that is, to be messengers. In the case of the ambassador, the task is to sustain the art of diplomacy, which is 'the art of uniting and keeping the friendship of princes'.[38] In political terms, this reflects an empirical power arrangement because, as Janet Coleman has noted, 'in Italy, the city as a corporate entity *was* the prince well before […] Bartolus used the phrase *civitas sibi princeps*,

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[33] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 95.
[34] Ibid., 88, 93.
[35] Ibid., 88.
[36] Ibid., 88.
[37] Ibid., 88. If one keeps in mind Edgard Garin's comment, *Il Messaggiero* confirms a peculiar position in Tasso's writings: 'The doctrines [of Tasso] do not say anything, though faithfully presented, and seem to be deprived of a soul'. Eugenio Donadoni observed: '"His speculation is outside time, it has no history"'; Edgard Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy – Volume 1* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2008), 522. Donadoni added: 'He [Tasso] has no interest for the problems of his times: no presentment on future's problems'; Eugenio Donadoni, *Torquato Tasso. Saggio critico – Volume 1* (Florence: Battistelli, 1920), 27. Francesco De Sanctis agreed: 'Tasso was not an original thinker, neither threw a free view on the formidable problems of life'; Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2015), 203.
[38] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, p. 92.

the city is its own prince'.[39] Of course, Tasso's definition has a normative philosophical content as much as many other similar definitions – if not all. More than four centuries later, for example, Martin Wight's definition would be similarly designed: 'It is the task of diplomacy to circumvent the occasions of war, and to extend the series of circumvented occasions'.[40] Having said that, it seems natural that a plural conception of diplomacy appears during the diverse historical phases and the same period as well.[41] History abounds with diverging conceptions of arts, and none of them are ideologically neutral. Diplomacy is not an exception. Its understanding is always problematic, which is natural for an art that deals with historical circumstances, constantly marked by conflicting political interests. Complex issues arise regarding what the ambassador must do, can do, and actually does. It is a problem reflected in the central strands of Tasso's text, which are devoted to eulogizing friendship as the ultimate diplomatic value and to defining the universal role of the ambassador as 'conjoiner of friendship' [*congiuntor d'amicizia*].[42] At this point, complex options appear.

4. Between Peace and War

Tasso is perfectly aware of the fact that the art of diplomacy is included in the sphere of war, otherwise any discussion of the subject would be meaningless. He recognizes that such a controversial art could equally tend not to unite but to divide, reducing the ambassador to a messenger of war, if he were ordered by the prince in this way. This is a political problem without a solution. War is an artificial phenomenon with a human origin that both creates and denies the function of diplomacy at same time. It has an impact on the ambassador who, in reality, cannot act in perfect accordance with an abstract ideal. But if diplomacy is an art – Tasso writes – and if the arts obey the norms of civil life and the scope of civil life is peace, then the universal aim of the ambassador cannot be anything other than peace.[43] Here, a mere syllogism can apparently separate the intricate practice of politics and diplomacy.

However, as Tasso notes, what is requested of the ambassador is to remain true to his role and not to be an enemy. In this way, his normative role merges with a political role, because as a

[39] Coleman, *A History of Political Thought*, 202.
[40] Wight, *Power Politics*, eds. Hedley Bull and Carsten Hollbrad (Leicester: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1978), 137.
[41] Cf. Riccardo Fubini, 'L'ambasciatore nel XV secolo. Due trattati e una biografia (Bernard de Rosier, Ermolao Barbaro, Vespasiano da Bisticci)', *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome* 108, (1996): 665.
[42] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 93. This formula reappears in a different form in the marvelous consolatory letter to the widow of the Tuscanian ambassador to Ferrara; Torquato Tasso, *Lettera consolatoria* (Bologna: Giovanni Rosti, 1588), 7.
[43] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 93.

'conjoiner of friendship' the ambassador can enjoy those immunities that define the international milieu even during a war. If he abandons his peculiar political position, the ambassador makes his 'biggest mistake and most harmful error, becoming an awful example'.[44] '*Ambasciator pena non porta*' is the nearly untranslatable, famous saying in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which in a single statement immortalises the intricate, evolving concept of diplomatic immunity.[45] The balance that the ambassador should maintain is not so much the balance of power, which is beyond his capacities and duties, but the balance between his irenical role and the political circumstances that tend to dissolve it. Of course, the balance of power is a precondition for diplomacy, as François de Callières clearly stated: 'When a prince or a state is powerful enough to dictate law to his neighbours the art of negotiation loses its value, for then there is need for nothing but a statement of the prince's will'.[46]

From this perspective, diplomacy consists of a perpetual motion from one provisional stage to another. Perhaps this is what has attracted the most diverse authors, including Tasso, partially explaining their fascination with the ambiguities of the diplomatic persona and inspiring their ruminations on his nature. The interest in the ambassador's role reveals an intriguing aspect if, as Mattingly has noted, for a long time the 'scholars and literary men often seem more given to the inverted idealism of *realpolitik* than working diplomats'.[47] In Tasso's case, it is remarkable that a man who is described as a self-centred courtier, lacking in original political thought, wrote a text that is so distant from the mythology of the warring-prince, which was one of the most pervasive ideologies of the Italian states.[48] On the contrary, he was concerned with a political figure who, according to his concept, was devoted to friendship and peace. Interestingly enough, the unremitting union between war and 'letters' was excluded from *Il Messaggiero*. By opposing the view that some ambassadors are concerned with peace and some with war, he maintains that every ambassador is essentially a figure of peace.

At this point, it should also be remembered that Tasso has been considered as being totally insensible to the sphere of politics and detached from the problems of his day.[49] However, as we

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[44] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 94.
[45] Cf. Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1556), 269. 'As a king's courier; yet was not content | To say, embassadors no wrong e'er underwent'; Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso – Volume 2*, ed. Trample H. Croker (London: Printed for the Editor, 1755), 19.
[46] François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (Amsterdam: La Compagnie, 1716), 88. Cfr. *The Art of Negotiating with Sovereign Princes* (London: Printed for Geo, etc., 1716) reprinted in F. de Callières, *The Art of Diplomacy*, eds. M. Keens-Soper and K. Schweizer (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1983). The only subsequent English translation is faulty; cfr. François de Callières, *The Practice of Diplomacy* (London: Constable Limited 1919), 111.
[47] Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 35.
[48] The above-mentioned qualities are mentioned in Luigi Firpo's deprecatory description of Tasso in his 'Introduzione', in Tasso, *Tre Scritti Politici*.
[49] Firpo, 'Introduzione', 12.

have seen, this conclusion could be now recalibrated. Perhaps his doctrine of diplomacy as a technique for peace is an example of the disposition to 'the practice of the most fanciful doctrines, enthusiasms, etc.' that Giacomo Leopardi has stigmatized.[50] In any case, while Tasso created his 'diplomatic' text in the form of an array of doctrines, modes of proof, rhetorical forms, and ethical counsels, he was, nevertheless, reshaping the landscape of diplomatic culture.

5. The Ambassador's Function

'Of all the offices necessary for the maintenance of a state, there is none more difficult to exercise than that of ambassador'. So says Louis, one of the protagonists that Juan Antonio De Vera created in his celebrated treaty *El Embaxador*, which explicitly pays homage to Tasso and his diplomatic dialogue.[51] The ambassador' office is undoubtedly necessary for the maintenance of the state, but the conceptual and practical roots of diplomacy are beyond the borders of domestic politics. The diplomatic function finds its raison d'être, not in the functioning of a state, but in the collective need arising from the interaction of political units. It concerns the problem of external relations and the coexistence among polities, or, as it is called today, the international dimension.

The resident ambassador is indeed placed, conceptually and in practice, outside of the space of the power that he represents. Therefore, the ambassador's function is not circumscribed by the borders of the polity he belongs to. He lives and acts in the space of the 'other'. But this is possible because of the mutual agreement that exempts him from the typical relationship of political obedience to territorial authorities. The ambassador unites different authorities, occupying an outer space, which is also external to the theoretical mechanism under which the

[50] For Leopardi, Tasso was 'the greatest philosopher of his days in terms of contemplation. But who could be less naturally disposed than he was to the practice of philosophy? ... And who less of philosopher than he was in practice ...? Conversely who is less of a philosopher in theory than certain carefree and imperturbable men who are always happy and calm, who yet in practice are the very model and type of the philosophical character and life. In truth, since nature always triumphs, it generally happens that those who are most philosophical in theory, are in practice the least philosophical, and those least disposed to philosophy in theory, are the most philosophical in fact. And you might then say that the aim, the intention, and the whole philosophy in theory along with all its precepts, etc., has no other target actually than to make the life and the character of those who possess it like that of those who are not naturally capable of it, an effect which it achieves with difficulty'; Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 1808. For a comment in relation to *Il Messaggiero* see Antonella Gatto, 'Il Tasso rivoluzionario. Note intertestuali sul dialogo di Torquato Tasso e del suo genio familiare', *Italies. Revue d'Études Italiens* 7, (2003): 115-135.

[51] Juan Antonio de Vera, *Le Parfait Ambassadeur* (Paris: s.n., 1642), 21. Supporting Tasso's concept of diplomacy, the Spanish ambassador calls Tasso 'divine'; Juan Antonio de Vera, *El Embaxador* (Sevilla: De Lyra, 1620), 13. See also the dialogical construction of the 368 page treaty by Giorgio Hertz, *Idea del perfetto ambasciatore. Dialoghi historici e politici* (Venice: Giorgio Hertz, 1654).

political structure of any single power is organized. For this reason, the conceptual structure of his persona is so complex and alienating.

This complexity is highlighted in Gasparo Bragaccia's remarkable attempt to understand the origin of the ambassador in his *L'Ambasciatore* (1627). In the sixth chapter, devoted to the essential function of the ambassador and reminiscent of Tasso's idea, he wrote that 'others think that it [the word *ambasciatore*] comes from the Latin word *ambo*, because the ambassador is a mediator [*mezzano*] between both of the two parts [*ambo* i.e. both]'.[52] 'Since he is sent for the common good', Bragaccia continued, 'and for this reason [he] enjoys many privileges, he has to unite the two parts as much as he can – the one that is sending him as much as the other one. For this reason, he is called ambassador'.[53]

Bragaccia's reasoning can be considered philologically extravagant, but it is fascinating and consonant with our discussion.[54] The connecting position of the ambassador is indeed a political quality, not an abstract concept. It allows the existence of the ambassador and his practice. It is a position which locates the diplomatic persona in an anomalous political space, neither inside nor outside but 'in between'. He is a figure of suture. He acts between powers, but with his own existence he also marks their mutual distinction. He performs his function along a symbolic perimeter that includes both the inside and the outside of artificially separated political spheres. Thus, his eccentric position implies a particular function: the mediator. Tasso's ambassador, the '*congiuntor d'amicizia*', inevitably has to deal with the tensions of politics and their impact on his mediating function.

6. The Tensions of Politics and the Limits of Diplomacy

To act as mediator is one of the most difficult tasks for the ambassador. For Tasso, this is the ambassador's fundamental function. But in order to perform this function, he inevitably generates political tensions at the borders of the notional perimeter which define his action. The first is the tension of power. This is the tension which arises from acting in a prince's interest and, simultaneously, in the interest of peace. The problem is that the state of friendship depends on the satisfaction of another prince's desire to be effective, not just the one who is represented by the ambassador. In the case of diverging interests between the princes, this reciprocal

[52] Gasparo Bragaccia, *L'ambasciatore* (Padua: Bolzetta, 1627), 61.
[53] Ibid., 61.
[54] '*Ambaisada*' is a Provençal word of Gallic-Latin origin with Germanic influences, which means roughly 'service'. Thus, the ambassador would be someone who serves; cf. Giuseppe Galasso, 'Le relazioni internazionali nell'età moderna', *Rivista Storica Italiana* 111, no. 1 (1999), 8.

condition creates a dilemma for Tasso's ambassador, that is, how to accommodate their interests, while keeping the state of peace, without debasing the dignity of the duties toward his own prince?

Persuasion is the only option for the ambassador because 'none could be a perfect ambassador without being also a good orator'. Hence, he has to 'take the friendly prince into the opinion and will of his prince'.[55] Unsurprisingly, eloquence is the crucial skill for changing the prince's opinions without hurting his will. If the greatest problem of diplomacy is to build a lasting amicable relationship between opposing wills, then mediation fulfils this function through the art of the word. Regarding his prince, the ambassador's duty is obviously to repeat what has already been said. But he can do this using different words, by changing the language and its expression.

It should be noted that this not a neutral practice. On the contrary, Tasso explains, its logical consequence is that the message includes a different essence.[56] It is a normative transposition, a political usage of the language. The practical purpose is to derive a derivative expression of collaboration from an original expression of discord. For Tasso, diplomatic ability is proportional to a capacity to decompose, and then recompose, an original expression, altering its intrinsic nature. In this sense, the ambassador has freedom of speech.

There is also a second kind of political tension, a moral tension. For Tasso, this is clearly the stronger tension concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour. If the prince's will is considered iniquitous by his own ambassador, what can be done with his unjust orders? What happens if the ambassador recognizes another prince's will as the right one instead of his own ruler's will? By suggesting these questions, Tasso's ethical stance does not seem introverted.[57] According to the authors of the modern literature regarding the ambassador, he is one of the first to consider this troublesome ethical tension.[58] Most of all, he is one of the few who eludes the ideology of obedience and order, which forty years later will be immortalised in De Vera's *Embaxador*.[59]

According to Tasso, the prince could be wrong and unjust. This possibility implies a pejorative image of the ruler's idealized and respected figure. This dark outline is in sharp contrast to the candid image of admirable ruling men. Princes are capable of making mistakes or being erroneous, and they could be morally flawed. This indirect critical position perhaps reveals

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[55] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 96-97.
[56] Ibid., 101.
[57] For a critical view on Tasso's moral attitude see Luigi Firpo, *Il pensiero politico di Torquato Tasso*, in Gino Luzzatto et al., *Studi in Onore di Gino Luzzatto – Volume 1*, (Milan: Giuffré, 1950), 177.
[58] Cf. Fedele, *Uno scritto del secondo Cinquecento*, 123.
[59] Cf. Bazzoli, *Stagioni e teorie della società internazionale*, 236.

something serious about Tasso's real opinion of the princes of his time. If this is the case, the canonical image of the servile Tasso who is always prone to power is rivalled by the critical Tasso who reflects on the ethical problems arising from the ambassador's conduct. Franco Fortini has noted the 'neurotic and self-destructive vocation of Tasso in provoking the powers and the powerful, which he showed since the time of his studies in Padua and Bologna'.[60] One may add that he composed *Il Messaggiero* during the first of seven years spent in the House of Este's prison.

Be that as it may, his indirect critical position is a fundamental aspect for Tasso's delineation of the diplomatic persona. Emphasizing the fallibility of the prince, Tasso restructures the prince's relation with his representative. He is introducing an element of symmetry and, so to speak, a tendency to impartiality. In doing so, he creates a moral space between the prince's orders and the ambassador's execution. This space of experience provides a marginal, yet relevant, degree of ethical and practical autonomy for the ambassador.

In discussing the limits of the ambassador's obedience to his prince, Tasso is concerned with the tension between one good and another. Though the two opposites are both goods, they are such that one of them can be recognised as a greater good than the other. This final choice will seldom be reached in Tasso's text, and if so, after a long confrontation, which is in itself the consummation of the tension, not relieving it but rather arriving at its fulfilment by lifting it up to a different plane. However, the principle of choice is always implicit in political tension. Therefore, Tasso explains that it is necessary to obey the prince, *but* his orders can be filtered and interpreted by the diplomat. The ambassador can persuade his own prince to change his mind 'demonstrating the injustice of his will'; however, in case of failure, he 'should ask to be exempted from executing unjust orders'.[61]

However, Tasso is aware that this situation would collapse the representational role of the ambassador and his function as well. The prince has ultimate political power, not the ambassador. Hence, there is no residual capacity in the ambassador's refusal to act. The culminating point of disagreement is the end for the ambassador. Thus, Tasso's view implies the assumption of disharmony as a characteristic of the ambassador's persona. In other words, it tends to violate some baseline condition of harmony or connectedness between the two subjects. For Tasso, there

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[60] Fortini, *Dialoghi col Tasso*, 29. It has been also noted that 'Tasso is exemplary for his discussion of his own psychic condition, evincing a self-analysis unparalleled by any contemporary – and matched in its representational power only by the character of Hamlet'. Interestingly, a lost Elizabethan play entitled *Tasso's Melancholy* 'may have served as a model for Shakespeare'; Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia. Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 20.

[61] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 98.

is no room in the real world for the perfect ambassador if the prince is imperfect. This condition cannot be changed by desire. Tasso is explicit: 'Imagination's mistake does not last' ['*l'error dell'immaginazione non dura*'].[62] Only in an imaginary, perfect city could the ambassador truly be a perfect man, and if someone serving a prince wished to be perfect 'he must retire in solitude outside of the human world'.[63] The relationship between diplomacy and political tension has a complex structure in Tasso's narrative. Even though he deploys different rhetorical strategies, his final argument is the necessity for political realism. Tasso, then, was not naive.

7. A Chimerical Ambassador?

Il Messaggiero had a strange destiny. It had been highly influential, but also criticized due to its abstraction and, sometimes, as an example of naivety. In his *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions*, Abraham de Wicquefort construed Tasso's 'chimerical ambassador' as one of 'the heroes of these poets'.[64] For his part, Alberico Gentili contradicted the view of the 'most erudite Tasso' ['*Tassus eruditissimus*'].[65] He refuted the opinion that the ambassador has his own autonomy in regard to belligerent and unjust orders. Quite the opposite, according to Gentili the ambassador is qualified as such because he strictly follows official orders: 'The mission entrusted to the ambassador is the mark at which he should aim' ['*Mandatum legato scopus est, quò collineet*'].[66] Gentili opposed the diplomatic persona created in *Il Messaggiero*, accusing Tasso of having confused reality with imagination.[67] Nonetheless, in Tasso the lessons of Machiavelli have been completely assimilated, and they are an effective component in Tasso's political thought.[68] In one of his early *Dialoghi*, he describes Machiavelli as the most important political thinker after Aristotle, together with Polibio and Guicciardini.[69] His indirect yet deliberate quotation of Machiavelli's words has been noted, together with Livy, by scholars.[70] The Christian orthodox could have read the Florentine, obviously omitting any direct reference to the blacklisted author.

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[62] Ibid., 50.
[63] Ibid., 99
[64] Abraham de Wicquefort, *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions – Volume 2* (Amsterdam: Chez T. Johnson, 1730 (1682)), 22. A resident ambassador at the French Court, Wicquefort served for thirty-two years as a Dutch diplomat.
[65] Alberico Gentili, *De Iure Belli Libri Tres* (Hanoviae: Excudebat Guilielmus Antonius, 1598), 457.
[66] Alberico Gentili, *De Legationibus Libri Tres*, 11.
[67] Ibid., 11.
[68] Cf. Giovanna Scianatico, *L'idea del perfetto principe. Utopia e storia nella scrittura del Tasso* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche, 1998), 120.
[69] *Della precedenza*, in Tasso, *Dialoghi – Volume 3*, ed. Ezio Raimondi, 487-488. Luigi Firpo believes that this quotation reveals 'a conformist [Tasso] subject to the principle of authority'; Firpo, 'Introduzione', 27.
[70] Fortini, *Dialoghi col Tasso*, 29, 54. For a specific examination see the entry 'Tasso, Torquato' by Emilio Russo in *Machiavelli. Enciclopedia machiavelliana – Volume 2*, ed. Gennaro Sasso (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2014), 589-590.

Machiavelli's lessons clearly appear in the final lines of *Il Messaggiero*. Tasso's ambassador is not detached from the reality of politics. On the contrary, diplomatic practice finally prevails over abstract concepts, and Tasso hopes that philosophers will never rule instead of princes. Yet princes can learn to be wise.[71] In the meantime, the antidote to the iniquities of power cannot be found in abstract models of perfection, but in the diplomat's capacity of dissimulation and manipulation. The ambassador's last resource to fulfil his mission of peace is not to transform the reality of princes, but to change their perception of reality. He should attempt to influence princely actions and reactions by manipulating the terms of their formal interaction, representing things with a different aspect than the true one.[72] This means modifying the words to be exchanged if they express conflictual wills, and using different words in order to generate friendship.

It is a difficult and dangerous practice, already mentioned by Machiavelli in the famous letter to the ambassador Raffaello Girolami: 'I know some men who, from being cunning and dissembling, have so entirely lost the confidence of the prince, that they have never more been able to negotiate with him'.[73] 'And yet', Machiavelli continued, 'if it be sometimes necessary to conceal facts with words, then it should be done in such a manner that it does not appear; or if it should be observed, then a defence should be promptly ready'.[74] As for Machiavelli, so too for Tasso. The ambassador has to face a dilemma which has an intrinsically ethical aspect and no solution. It presents a problematic separation between two individuals who properly belong together: the prince and the ambassador. In one of his maxims, François de La Rochefoucauld immortalised a significant part of this aspect: 'What makes us often dissatisfied with those who carry out a negotiation is that they almost always abandon the interests of their friends in the interests of successful negotiation. The success becomes their own, because they have the honour of accomplishing what they had undertaken'.[75]

Some of the means to reach the mediator's end and fulfil the ambassador's highest function of keeping friendship are by changing the confrontational aspect of political reality through the manipulation of words, representing circumstances purified of their conflictive content, and by searching for the proper moment to stay silent or discuss. Apart from the moral implications, the

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[71] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 99.
[72] Ibid., 101.
[73] 'Confidential Instructions by Niccolò Machiavelli to Raffaello Girolami, on His Departure, 28 October 1522, as Ambassador to the Emperor Charles V, in Spain', in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Historical, Political, and Diplomatic Writings of Niccolò Machiavelli – Volume 4* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 422.
[74] Ibid., 422.
[75] François de La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and other Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79.

art of diplomacy requires at least one main quality related to the assessment of the circumstances of time and space. It requires the ability to seize and exploit the right moment, the useful occasion — the 'art of timing' or *kairos*. The ambassador should be a master of timing and occasions.[76] Tasso's idea thus embodies a clear conception of *kairos*, the transient opportunity — that youngest son of Zeus who had an altar at Olympia, and was later pictured with a long forelock while the back of his head was bald. The ambassador's opportunism, which creates the favourable moment, shades without clear distinction into the opportunism that awaits the favourable moment and seizes it. In fact, Tasso is describing an opportunism that does not simply await the favourable moment but seeks to create it. It exploits circumstances so as to produce the desired opportunity. It is rigging the historical process, seeking the occasion ['*cercando l'occasione*'].[77]

8. Beyond the Messenger

At this point it should be noted that, rather than a mere exercise of style, *Il Messaggiero* possesses profound political implications for the conception of the diplomatic persona. Tasso is not only interested in the ideas themselves, but also in the way in which ideas function as a guide for diplomatic action in case of recalcitrant conditions. This is clearly expressed in the paradoxical conclusion that emerges in the final lines of his dialogical text. The human messenger, or the ambassador, is *not* just a messenger.[78] His role is more complicated and hazardous. In other words, Tasso's political thought rejects the concept of the ambassador as a mere executor of policy. This is a striking departure from the previous general conception of the ambassador who is obliged to scrupulously follow the commissions he received from the authorities he was representing, and blindly obeying their orders.[79] Tasso may not clearly express this position, so his imaginary interlocutor is entrusted with the task of getting him safely to a calculated yet corrosive conclusion which deserves quoting at length:

> If the ambassador would not be other than a mere reporter of what has been said, he would not need either prudence or eloquence, and every ordinary man would be fit for this office; but we see that princes select the

[76] Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 102.
[77] Ibid., 101-102.
[78] On the argument that diplomats are not just messengers, see Giulio Talini's article, 'Saint-Pierre, British pacifism and the quest for perpetual peace (1693–1748)', *History of European Ideas* 46, no. 8 (2020): 1165-1182.
[79] See Maria Nadia Covini, Bruno Figliuolo, Isabella Lazzarini, and Francesco Senatore, 'Pratiche e norme di comportamento nella diplomazia italiana. I carteggi di Napoli, Firenze, Milano, Mantova, e Ferrara tra fine XIV e fine XV secolo', in *De l'Ambassadeur*, eds. Stefano Andretta, Stéphane Péquinot and Jean Claude Waquet, 132. Cf. Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict.*

ambassadors after a diligent investigation. We must therefore conclude that their role concerns something more than simply reporting words and messages.[80]

Their role concerns the use of clever devices that are required for reaching the highest good for the cities at issue, that is, the union of the princes. '*Artificio*' is the single noun which Tasso repeats, a Latin word composed by *ars* and *facere*, 'art' and 'make'. At the individual level, diplomacy is the art of using clever devices to defuse political tension. It is a matter of artifice because the ambassador is truly a person, that is, a person in its etymological meaning, a theatrical mask. He plays his role on the theatre of power. Far from being a mere execution of orders and messages, his representations to princes, those formal statements made to a higher authority, are the epitaph for the ability of the prince to truly represent himself. As any translator partially recreates an author's text, the ambassador partially recreates the prince's authentic words and so, this partiality can be strategic. His representational capacity exceeds the simple representation of any single prince, including the one he is officially representing.

The persona of the ambassador and the prince's figure simply do not coincide, not even in those fictional terms invented to represent power. The representative person and the represented must always be identifiable, as Tasso writes in regard to the diplomatic ceremonial.[81] Thus, in *Il Messaggiero* the diplomatic persona gravitates at his own representational level. This is a recognition that the diplomatic sphere intersects the political sphere, but they do not perfectly overlap. The diplomatic persona maintains its relative representational autonomy, and even produces his own representation.[82] Most of all, the ambassador has the possibility to manipulate the fiction of power in its external aspect, which he partially incarnates.

9. Fictionalized Diplomacy

Machiavelli deals with one of the fictions that is somehow related to the art of diplomacy in its written form. To him, the ambassador should attempt to get the attention of the sovereign, however, while communicating his judgement to the government, he should employ phrases

[80] ['*E se l'ambasciatore altro non fosse che semplice riportatore de le cose dette, non avrebbe bisogno né di prudenza né d'eloquenza, e ogni uomo ordinario sarebbe atto a quest'ufficio; ma noi veggiamo che i principi con diligente investigazione fanno scelta de gli ambasciatori. Dobbiamo dunque conchiuder ch'altro lor si convenga che portare e riportare semplicemente parole e ambasciate*']; Tasso, *Il Messaggiero*, 102.
[81] Ibid., p. 103.
[82] See the superlative Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy. Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

something like this: 'Considering now all I have written, the shrewd men here judge that it will produce such or such an effect'.[83] This strategy – Machiavelli continued – 'carefully followed has, in my day, done great honour to many ambassadors, whilst the contrary course has brought shame and blame upon them'.[84]

This is Machiavelli's rhetorical device applied to diplomacy, which is an exercise of literary fiction with a diplomatic purpose. It is the introduction of an imaginary filter between the ambassador's opinions and the prince. While he is dissimulating his own judgement, the ambassador must elude any direct confrontation with the prince. In Machiavelli's example, the invention of a fictional interlocutor ('the shrewd men') is an imaginary replacement for the real ambassador who is actually writing. It is indeed a literary invention that creates a fictional representation for the ambassador's own prince, not for a rival. In other words, it is a representation of the representative (the ambassador) created for the represented (the prince) – a *non plus ultra* of the diplomatic artifice.

Wicquefort, an admirer of Machiavelli, has pointed out the parallel between diplomacy and theatre in the most vivid way. He opened his description of the ambassador's general function in the following terms: 'There isn't any personage more comical than the ambassador. There isn't any theatrical place more illustrious than the court. There isn't any comedic situation where the actors seem less of what they really are than the negotiating ambassadors; and there isn't any situation which represents the most important personages.'[85] In Wicquefort's view, diplomacy was a sort of drama where the represented and the representative met the political reality. However, at the basis of this common representation there was mutual understanding of what the 'international' was or, at least, a potentially consensual interpretation. It was this condition that opened the way for the elaboration of the diplomatic representation as related to evolving legal prerogatives. This process includes one of the most egregious fictions regarding the diplomatic persona and the rise of the 'international', which are the immunities of the resident ambassador as discussed by Tasso. Hugo Grotius, the Swedish ambassador from 1635 to 1645, reflected on this social aspect of the *De Legationum Iure*. He noted the following:

> wherefore I am fully persuaded that though it has prevailed as a common custom everywhere, that all people that reside in foreign countries should be subject to the laws of those countries; yet that an exception should be made in favour of ambassadors, who, as they are, by a sort of fiction, taken for the very persons whom they represent, ('he brought along with him', said Cicero of a certain ambassador, 'the majesty of a

[83] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere – Volume 2*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi-Gallimard, 1997), 731.
[84] Machiavelli, 'Confidential Instructions by Niccolò Machiavelli to Raffaello Girolami', 423.
[85] Wicquefort, *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions – Volume 2*, 3.

> Senate, and the authority of a Commonwealth') so may they by the same kind of fiction be imagined to be out of the territories of the potentate to whom they are sent. Hence, it is that they are not subject to the laws of the country where they reside.[86]

The diplomatic fiction has not only coexisted with the material aspects of political power, but it has pre-existed the legal fiction of juridical extraterritoriality. Its political function has been dependent on the growing recognition of a specific relation between the state's imaginary 'person' and the diplomatic persona. From this perspective, the diplomat's position has been persistently related to the political context at two different levels; the first is the level between governments, the second is the level between the governments and the ambassador. In this way, the diplomatic persona concretely redefines the relationship between the representative and the represented. If the representative symbolizes the authority of the represented, then the political physiognomy of the represented is itself an expression of the representative. What was one of Tasso's problems in his discussion of the diplomatic persona was for Grotius a positive condition to argue for the ambassador's immunity, by sustaining that the rise of diplomacy, as an autonomous sphere of action based on the diplomat's fictional character, derived from the fiction of sovereignty.

In this type of mirror, the image of the diplomatic persona cannot ever be symmetrically reflected. It has a constant historical movement which produces only a relative correspondence among different images. In other words, the diplomatic system of representation, as with any other system, generates feedback which varies with its context. Any action of the diplomat goes back to the political authority, as if it were that of the political authority itself. The intellectual stalemate of this duality cannot be surpassed, only discussed and elaborated. The represented fiction of the diplomatic persona concerns a fundamental aporia, so that its inherent characteristics may appear different to different interpreters, sometimes as contradictions and sometimes as solutions.

This is why Antonio Gramsci's critique of the ambassador's incapacity to change the reality of politics in 'progressive' terms is today perfectly understandable. 'The diplomat inevitably will move only within the bounds of effective reality, since his specific activity is not the creation of new equilibrium, but the maintenance of an existing equilibrium within a certain juridical framework'.[87] But to maintain a political equilibrium is a real act of creativity, as Tasso argued,

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[86] Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace – Volume 2*, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 912.

[87] Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoofrey Nowell Smith (New York: International publishers, 1992), 172.

not a metaphorical action, as Gramsci implies: 'In politics in fact, the element of will is far greater importance than in diplomacy'.[88] At best, 'diplomacy sanctions and tends to conserve situations created by the clash of the policies between states; it is only creative metaphorically or by political convention (all human activity is creative)'.[89] For Gramsci, the diplomatic persona has the habit of a subaltern profession that must accept another's will (the political will of the diplomat's government), which is extraneous to the personal convictions of the diplomat. He may feel that will to be his own, insofar as it corresponds to his own convictions; but, on the other hand, he might not. Since diplomacy has become a specialized profession, this has had the effect of allowing the diplomat to become estranged from the policies of changing governments.[90] It is the success of specialization that has corroded the creativity of the diplomat, along with the after-effects of bureaucratisation. 'Just by virtue of his professional habit, the diplomat is inclined to be sceptical and narrow-mindedly conservative.'[91] In this perspective, the troubled ambassador of Tasso and his complex persona have disappeared.

10. Conclusion

Diplomacy, as a human activity, has always been accompanied by a symbolic machinery representing the necessity for dialogue. This is the essence of the ambassador who finds an expression in Tasso's thought as well as in Raymond Aron's words. International relations 'are expressed in and by specific actions, those individuals whom I shall call symbolic, the diplomat and the soldier'.[92] For the French thinker, 'two men, and only two, no longer function as individual members but as representative of the collectivises to which they belong: the ambassador, in the exercise of his duties, is the political unit in whose name he speaks; the soldier on the battlefield is the political unit in whose name he kills his opposite number'.[93] Thus, 'the ambassador and the soldier live and symbolize international relations'.[94]

Four centuries after Tasso's *Messaggiero*, the ambassador is categorically defined as a dialogical persona, the human expression of political dialogue in its international form. The essence of the ambassador emerges in contrast to the soldier, revealing the antinomy of their

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[88] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks - Volume 3*, eds. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 72.
[89] Ibid., 72.
[90] Ibid., 73-74.
[91] Ibid., 72.
[92] Raymond Aron, *Peace and War. A Theory of International Relations* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 5.
[93] Ibid., 5.
[94] Ibid., 5.

ultimate purposes: to fight war and to keep peace. The ambassador speaks, and uses the art of the word. This is what defines his political action as a representative. But actually, the ambassador does not live and symbolize a single state. On the contrary, the office symbolizes the existence of the international and the element of unity in the political organization that is created through dialogue among states.

So, if that is the case, Tasso's idea of the diplomatic persona is somewhat vindicated in this contemporary conception of the ambassador. His text might significantly trace how, in European thought, diplomacy has become a relevant category of interpretation, if not of reflection. Of course, I do not claim to have adequately identified the significance of *Il Messaggiero*. The whole idea of identifying a definitive significance would be alien to this study, in that: 'All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out'.[95] The growth of diplomacy and the rise of the 'international' presented Tasso with an exceptional dilemma regarding the diplomatic persona and the ambassador's fluid identity. It is a political dilemma that he intended to find an answer to, but, as everyone else, he fell short.

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[95] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 474.

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