

## The Diplomatic Viol

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My starting point is an oft-cited but little discussed quotation from a curious 1740 publication. Hubert Le Blanc, in his *Defense de la basse de viole, contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncel* (Amsterdam, 1740), described the sound of the bass viol as “resembling the tone of voice of an Ambassador, which is not loud, and is even a little nasal.”<sup>1</sup> While the word *nazarde* may bring to mind images of sleazy, sycophantic courtiers—and a “nasal” tone in fact became a stereotype of unenlightened diplomats in the nineteenth century—I would like to indulge for a moment that Le Blanc meant this comment to be taken at face value. What we have then is an account of a viol—an inanimate instrument—sounding like a very specific kind of person, with a specific tone and a specific social background.

I do not wish to perform here a mere “contextualization” of this curious comment. Rather, I intend to explore the cultural conditions that allowed Le Blanc to liken the sound of the viol to that of an ambassador. I also wish to investigate the social *scenes* implied by such a statement and to explore how the viol—an instrument of wood and gut—became allied

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with ideas of the negotiations and negotiators that divided up the world across the long eighteenth century. My project thus responds to what literary scholar Timothy Hampton has termed “diplomatic poetics.” Hampton proposes a way of reading literature “attuned to the shadow of the Other at the edge of the national community, and a way of reading diplomacy that would take into account its fictional and linguistic dimensions.”<sup>2</sup> For Hampton, diplomacy is the symbolic act *par excellence*—a form of action that is eminently political but semiotic at essence, for it is based on the exchange of legible signs. The success of diplomacy is dependent on the correct interpretation of those signs. Thus, diplomatic action is equivalent to symbolic action.

I contend that music presents an even stronger case than literature for the reflection and constitution of diplomatic practice, because of early claims to music’s abilities to effect non-linguistic, non-verbal, and even universal communication.<sup>3</sup> If diplomacy is the exchange and interpretation of signs, then surely music—and especially music that does not have recourse to language—could be allied even more closely than literature to diplomatic praxis. Sound, too, was a vital component of the symbolic language of diplomacy.

In this chapter, I argue that a musical instrument could enable, embody, and represent diplomatic practice. I take the viol as my example in part because the development of the modern, resident embassy and institutionalization of a recognizably modern diplomacy occurred in tandem with the cultivation of the viol as *the* instrument of elite sociability, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Tracing the history of the viol thus also means tracing the history of diplomacy as it became a regular system of communication between (modernizing) states. I focus on three points of interaction. First, I explore the role of the viol in elite sociability. In this period, diplomatic representation was the province of elites, and the social life of the viol was inextricably linked to the same circles that produced ambassadors.<sup>4</sup> The viol aided in developing the comportment necessary to an ambassador: forming the hands, positioning the body, communicating a notion of uprightness, and easy, regulated, graceful action. As an instrument of polite social performance, the viol continued to provide pleasure and civilized social interaction to generations of diplomats as they embarked on their careers. The viol’s scene thus overlapped with and aided in the construction of the diplomatic scene.

Second, the idea of the resident embassy and of diplomatic representation in general was understood to be a question of bodily presence in this

period. Thus, I consider the material capabilities of the viol to construct a notion of the domesticated—and yet cosmopolitan—negotiator, occupying a space that was at home in the world. The materiality of the viol, its shape, its construction, and the materials from which it was created, was itself charged with the luxury and rarity of the ambassadorial class. Many of those materials were dependent on the work of diplomacy: of negotiating long-distance trade, of maintaining or obtaining status as a colonial power.

Lastly, considering that sound was an essential component of the symbolic language of diplomacy, the sound of the viol could provide a model for negotiators. The instrument was long purported to be the one most capable of imitating the human voice. Yet this was a non-linguistic capability. Generations of commentators lauded the viol's uncanny ability to express emotions beyond words and to affect the inmost feelings of its auditors. Above all, it possessed the sound of intimacy: of intimacy with the sovereign, of the intimate conversations that more frequently concluded negotiations than any staged congress could.

In studying the viol this way, I am responding to research centered on the agency of musical instruments in human social lives. Particularly salient to my thinking is the work of ethnomusicologists like Ali Jihad Racy, who observed that instruments “perpetually negotiate or renegotiate their roles, physical structures, performance modes, sound ideals, and symbolic meanings.”<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, Maria Sonevtsky has identified the instrument as an “active actor in the negotiation of meaning in performance,” which is capable of steering “the interpretive maneuvering that occurs between performer and listener.”<sup>6</sup> The reflections of Racy and Sonevtsky seem particularly well suited to my project, as early modern diplomacy was not called “diplomacy” at all but the *art of negotiation*. As we shall see, the viol was itself a remarkably capable negotiant, for no other instrument had the sound of the viol.

An approach centered on social scenes is particularly valuable for instruments, like the viol, that were cultivated by a surprisingly durable network over hundreds of years. Here I follow Eliot Bates, who has argued for studying the “social life of musical instruments” in a way that takes into account the entangled and complex relationships “between humans and objects, humans and humans, and between objects and other objects.”<sup>7</sup> Bates's concern, and mine, is not merely to study instruments as incidental to social interactions but also the agency they possess to create social interactions and social scenes. In the case of the viol, part of its stability as an objective presence in facilitating social negotiations may be due to the

stability of the language used to describe it. *If*, as Ian Woodward insists, “it is stories and narratives that hold an object together, giving it cultural meaning” it would seem that the viol—with its remarkably stable, consistent narratives—was and is a particularly durable reservoir of meaning.<sup>8</sup> The language used to describe the viol, over and over again across time, intimately links it to the world of the diplomat, a world contingent on being able to be heard but not to offend, to mediate between different, often contentious, voices.

### ELITE INSTRUMENTS

The social life of the viol was inextricably linked to the same circles that produced ambassadors. First cultivated at the same northern Italian courts that developed the idea of the resident embassy, the viol quickly spread along channels of polite communication to be adopted in the highest social circles across Europe (and beyond)—those which were most likely to produce ambassadors. What made the viol so attractive to elites were the physical traits necessary to its performance. Simply put, a body looked good while playing the viol. And that body began to look—and act—ever better as the viol technique developed across the seventeenth century. Whereas most writers of the sixteenth century concerned themselves with the sonic appeal of viol playing, the discourse gradually assumed a moral cast, emphasizing an upright playing position and a balanced body. Perhaps responding to contemporary notions that comportment reflected moral character, viol tutors began emphasizing an upright carriage for both player *and instrument*. The viol thus became an essential training for the bodies and souls of young elites. As a method of training, as a mode of sociability, the sound of the viol resonated throughout the world of the early modern diplomat.

One of the earliest and most often repeated references to the viol in elite sociability derives from Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano*, first published in 1528, a work that has been viewed as an important early text in the history of diplomacy. Castiglione, himself an ambassador, based his work on his experiences at the court of Urbino in the early sixteenth century. Urbino was at the forefront of a trend toward resident embassies that shaped modern diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> It was also an early adopter of an instrument still in its infancy, the *viola da gamba* (which I refer to more familiarly as the “viol”).<sup>10</sup> Castiglione’s views on the positive effects of music in international relations relate to Renaissance conceptions of cosmic harmony

and order made audible through “good music.”<sup>11</sup> Particularly well suited for these purposes, in Castiglione’s view, was the sound of the viol. Castiglione singles out the viol as uniquely amenable to courtly sociability in a passage given in the voice of Diplomat Federico Fregoso on the nature of “beautiful” music:

Beautiful music, replied Sir Federico, consists in singing well and with a beautiful style from the score; but even more so singing to the viol... Above all, most gratifying is the singing to the viol of prose, this adds so much loveliness and efficacy to the words, which is a great marvel ... And no less delightful is the music of four viols, which is the sweetest and most artificial.<sup>12</sup>

I return to the idea of voice and viol uniting and mutually reinforcing each other below. The point I will make here is that the viol had already come to dominate courtly musical sociability by the time Castiglione wrote these words, thanks to powerful patron-musicians like Isabella d’Este who had developed a taste for the instrument as early as the 1490s.<sup>13</sup>

Soon, the viol was cultivated in other places by other sorts of elites as well. Philibert Jambe de Fer explicitly linked the instrument to those elites charged with negotiating the world in the mid-sixteenth century. “We call viols,” he writes, “those instruments with which gentlemen, merchants, and other persons of quality pass their time. ...I have not illustrated the violin for you because it is considered beneath the viol, also because there are few persons to be found who use it, if not those who live by its labor.”<sup>14</sup> As early as 1556, then, the viol was the province of “persons of quality,” whereas the violin was a low instrument for the hired help—a stereotype that Le Blanc would weaponize in his 1740 treatise. More pertinent to my point, however, is the kind of company Jambe de Fer kept and to whom his treatise is addressed. Jambe de Fer was a part-time musician who was otherwise a *corratier juré*—a broker of deals between sellers and buyers, whose activities were governed by the consular jurisdiction of Lyon, which was a center of international trade at the time.<sup>15</sup> Today his occupation would fall under trade diplomacy.

Jambe de Fer was one of the first to remark on how the viol ought to be held. While his instructions are vague, he clearly notes that the playing posture differed between “Italians” and “French” and that in France, at least, a position that balanced the bodies of the player and instrument in an upright position was to be preferred. His comments echoed through to

the seventeenth century, as posture in viol playing began to be conflated with notions of moral uprightness. Whereas most sixteenth-century writers concerned themselves with the aesthetic appeal of viol playing, the discourse gradually assumed a moral cast, emphasizing an upright playing position and a balanced body. And this despite—or maybe because—of the fact that the instrument itself had changed significantly. Jambe de Fer’s “French” instruments had only five strings, for instance, whereas he described “Italian” instruments as possessing six. Organological and iconographic evidence of the time similarly demonstrates wide variety in the shapes of viols and how they were held. Yet this diversity evened out by the early seventeenth century, when a six-stringed instrument positioned vertically between the legs became the norm across Europe and beyond.<sup>16</sup> Viols and viol players, their bodies united by the act of performance, thus took part in what Racy has termed a “dialectical process” in which instruments and their players “readjust or reaffirm their positions as they respond to, and act upon, a complex network of demographic, political, musical, physiological, acoustical and ideological factors.”<sup>17</sup>

So which came first, the upright position of the viol or the moral insistence of viol tutors? That we cannot know. What we can know is that the viol became essential training for the bodies and souls of young elites, many destined for careers in international relations. I give but one, albeit extended, example here of the importance of the viol for (future) negotiators. Dutch Diplomat and man of letters Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) perceived learning the viol as an essential part of childhood education. Huygens began learning the viol at age six, when his father (also a servant of the state) engaged an English mercenary soldier as a viol teacher.<sup>18</sup> By the age of 11, young Constantijn was capable enough to participate in music making with the likes of famous organist and composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. The pattern of musical movement education Huygens instituted for his sons Constantijn Jr. (who himself eventually assumed state duties) and Christiaan (the great scientist) mirrored his own: first singing, then the viol, then dance, then other instruments. Undoubtedly, the attraction of the viol for Huygens lay not only in its ability to “perfect” the voice—a feature lauded by numerous viol tutors of the time—but also in its power to shape the body. We can guess that the Huygens children were taught to play in an upright manner: seated easily, feet firmly on the floor with toes gracefully pointed slightly outward, the viol carefully balanced on the calves and thighs, the neck of the viol held mostly upright, though tilted slightly so as not to obscure the highly held, forward-facing head of the performer.<sup>19</sup>

The uprightness of the viol tallied well with Huygens's own beliefs in the moral effects of posture. At that time, it was commonplace to assume that a person's exterior reflected his interior.<sup>20</sup> Any physical defect, be it crookedness of the spine or a twist in a limb, indicated moral deficiency. Poor posture, if not corrected, could warp the soul. So extreme was Huygens's commitment to uprightness that he made a drastic decision regarding his eldest son in 1637, when the boy was nine years old. Apparently, since the age of four, the head of little Constantijn Jr. had tilted to the left, a sure portent of lasciviousness, femininity, and moral weakness. His concerned parents tried everything to cure him, from purges to steam to corrective apparatus. But nothing worked. Finally, the desperate father made an equally desperate decision: he allowed a doctor in Utrecht to operate. The life-threatening surgery was successful, Constantijn Jr. finally had his head on straight, and a month later, he began to learn the viol.<sup>21</sup>

### NEGOTIATING MATERIALS

My second point of interaction concerns material capabilities of the viol to construct a notion of domesticated cosmopolitanism. The very physical presence of the viol could mediate and represent social stature, much in the same way as the physical presence of the resident ambassador. At the same time, the viol as a physical object was subject to negotiation. Buyers haggled prices with sellers of antique instruments and ambassadors negotiated treaties of commerce and colonization that affected the manufacture of new ones. And viols, especially the highly ornamented viols in favor by the end of the seventeenth century, regularly incorporated exotic materials dependent on overseas trade and/or colonization.

To return to my example of the Huygens family: by the late 1630s, they could form their own chamber group of six viols, but they needed quality instruments. Huygens's diplomatic connections proved useful in this quest, as his correspondence reveals. He enjoined the Secretary to the Dutch Ambassador at London, Maarten Snouckaert van Schauburg, to search for a chest—a matched set—of English-made viols. Snouckaert, undoubtedly through his professional contacts at the English court, enlisted English Court Musician Nicolas Lanier to the cause. Writing to Huygens in August 1638, Snouckaert reported:

I wrote to you before my departure from England...that one of the foremost members of the music of Their Majesties...has personally taken charge

of the search for the elite instruments that you wish to have. Since then, he has found...a consort of six old viols, but the most excellent one could ever find.<sup>22</sup>

The price was 30 pounds sterling for the set, which Snouckaert felt was rather high. By January of 1639, Snouckaert had managed to haggle the price down to 27½ pounds plus a “gray Dutch hat,” assuring Huygens that even though Lanier and other musicians of the English court had judged the viols to be “very excellent, very rare, and well worth the price of 30 pounds,” he had wished to ensure that Huygens received the best price possible.<sup>23</sup> One might speculate about the Dutch hat: was this a symbolic exchange of one rarity for six others? Regardless, the viols made their way across the Channel, to find a new home and new lives with the Huygens family.

Huygens’s desire to acquire “elite” English instruments for his domestic consort underscores the idea that an instrument itself could embody social class. What made his English viols “elite” was their age and reputation; already by the 1630s, viols of English manufacture from the late sixteenth century were recognized as the finest available. Much like a Stradivarius violin today, viols by makers like John Rose retained their value for centuries. Other viols were made still rarer by the exotic materials with which they were decorated. Richard Leppert has productively explored the relationship between materials and prestige in his discussion of the sorts of hyper-ornamentation found on viols.<sup>24</sup> Discussing a 1701 viol by Hamburg luthier Joachim Tielke, now in Brussels, Leppert observes that “the instrument’s very materiality is a mute signifier of political subjection, just as its physical beauty is a disguise worn by subjection, to both construct and authorize prestige,” for it is crafted not of native European hardwoods but of exotic materials culled from European colonies.<sup>25</sup>

Exotic materials certainly contributed to the transformation of the viol (and other instruments) across this period. Some materials seem to have been used rather for their appearance or rarity than for their potential to produce sound. Such is the case with the *Cedrela odorata* (commonly known as “Spanish cedar” or “West Indian cedar”) used by Parisian luthier Michel Collichon to craft the bodies of at least three surviving instruments.<sup>26</sup> The three bass viols, dated 1683, 1687, and 1688, all use this same wood, which is more commonly found in veneers than in the bodies of instruments. In other words, the origin of the wood trumped its functionality. It will likely never be known how Collichon obtained this wood or why he used it. What seems clear is its origin in the French West Indies, first colonized by France in 1635.



I emphasize here that the power to obtain such exotic materials was the product of negotiation. A driving force in diplomacy of the long eighteenth century was the divvying up of the world's riches.<sup>27</sup> Colonial territories and their products and people were bought, sold, won, or lost through networks of European international relations, whether peaceful or bellicose. The very dedicatee of Le Blanc's *Defense*, Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux, *comte de Maurepas* (1701–1781), was directly responsible for the defense and development of French overseas territories as Secretary of the Navy between 1723 and 1749—and for the collection of hundreds of songs in what is today known as the *Chansonnier Maurepas*. His actions, which included maintaining his own network of informants, enabled France to regain prestige and position as a naval power. And his primary concern at the time Le Blanc wrote his treatise was the sprawling French Empire in the New World.<sup>28</sup>

Other supply routes were no less important, however. A direct acknowledgment of the role of negotiation in viol fabrication comes from a dispute between two writers in the 1680s. Le Sieur Danoville (no first name known) declared that the bow of the viol *must* be of “bois de la Chine.” This wood of the Asian Tung tree was ideal for Danoville's purposes because of its density and flexibility. As Danoville stated, a bow should not be too heavy “because it renders the hand too peasant-like,” nor too light “because it does not draw out enough harmony”; rather, the weight should be proportionate to the hand.<sup>29</sup> Note that Danoville's choice of adjective—*pesante*—again brings to the fore issues of social class, just as his emphasis on proportion speaks of the idealized balance of viol and body. Shortly thereafter, Jean Rousseau responded to Danoville's insistence with the observation that “it seems to me that many sorts of other woods are used to make bows, which are no less good than the wood of China.”<sup>30</sup> Admitting that Tung bows are quite good, Rousseau nonetheless asserts they are not required, “for if this were the case and if one no longer had commerce with the Chinese, the viol would have to be abandoned.”<sup>31</sup> He therefore recommended flexibility in choosing bow wood. And, despite Danoville's pleas for Asian wood, the woods of choice for viol bows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as today, were New World hardwoods.

Rousseau realized that trade was subject to negotiation and that overseas imports were subject to fluctuations in supply. Likely, most delighted owners of elaborately decorated viols never gave a thought to the human and environmental toll exacted by their instruments.<sup>32</sup> They were more concerned with the ability to both look and sound pleasing, for the materials of the viol were thoroughly conditioned by its social function.

## THE “VIOL” SOUND OF DIPLOMACY

If the viol’s materials could represent state policies abroad, it could also fulfill other essential tasks of the ambassador: it could mediate and negotiate. Nowhere is this ability more apparent than in the description of the viol’s *son continu*—its “continuous sound.” Sound was, and is, an important part of the symbolic language of diplomacy. The determining factor in the success of negotiations, in the opinion of contemporary writers on the subject, was the tone—a product of the ambassador’s character. François de Callières, in his important manual on negotiation, stresses that a negotiator should possess flexibility, an equal humor, and “an approach always open, sweet, civil, agreeable, with easy and insinuating manners.”<sup>33</sup> Antoine Pecquet’s 1737 “update” of Callières treatise goes even further, declaring that while a negotiator must sometimes be firm, he must also cultivate “sweetness in language, agreement in society.” Above all, the negotiator must conduct himself with “extreme delicacy.”<sup>34</sup>

The continuous sound of the viol, due to the use of the bow, gave it flexibility and a mediating quality peculiarly close to contemporary descriptions of effective negotiators. Danoville, for one, asserted that “by its sweetness it attenuates [elle attendrit] the sound of iron strings, unifying by its continuous sound the divided sound of other instruments.”<sup>35</sup> Most important to Danoville is the ability of the viol’s sweetness to render the sounds—and hence the emotions—of other instruments more sensitive and tender. *Attendrir* in fact had a moral sense at this time: the sound of the viol could bring others into harmony, creating concert out of discord, just like a mediator at a peace conference negotiating between contentious voices.<sup>36</sup>

The viol’s sustaining, flexible sound character also permitted comparison to the human voice. Such comparison not only humanized the viol, it also created a space in which the instrument could be ever more closely linked to the intimate human interactions on which the conduct of negotiations depended. The viol’s uncanny ability to wordlessly articulate emotions and convey meaning as effectively as any orator posed challenges to those theorists attempting to describe its effects. For Marin Mersenne, the viol’s preeminent ability to imitate the human voice renders it an instrument of human emotions. He states that the viol:

is the true image of the disposition of the voice... Those who have heard excellent players and good consorts of viols know that there is nothing more ravishing after beautiful voices than the dying strokes of the bow which

accompany the tremblings on the fingerboard, but because it is no less difficult to describe this grace than that of a perfect Orator, one must hear it to comprehend it.<sup>37</sup>

Mersenne recognizes here the insufficiency of language to describe the experience of listening, whether to viols or to orators. But it is the similarity between the viol and the voice that facilitates his comparison: like a human orator, the viol could speak, the viol could breathe.

Mersenne's correspondent Pierre Trichet recognized the disability of descriptive language in the viol article of his *Traité des instruments* (c. 1640), in a passage that freely paraphrases Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Trichet concludes with Castiglione's advice to not play the viol for the ignorant or low but with a twist: "it is just as necessary that reason and judgment control the rudder as it is in all other human actions."<sup>38</sup> Trichet's use of the phrase *tenir le gouvernail* immediately places this statement in the realm of political discourse, for the rudder in this phrase was ever understood to mean "the rudder of government." Taken together, Trichet's rudder and Mersenne's orator indicate that the viol, *because of its purported ability to imitate the human voice*, was also able to bear political signification—thus providing essential background to understanding why Le Blanc was able to describe the viol as having the tone of an ambassador.

The development of political theory across the long eighteenth century emphasized the importance of being able to control effectively the rudder of government in order to steer a straight and steady course to the accomplishment of state priorities, which generally had to do with maintaining the balance of power. Or, in the words of Hubert Le Blanc, who was after all a doctor of the law, one must *tenir le juste milieu*—a quality he deemed native to the viol.<sup>39</sup> This notion of balance and control was emphasized in both viol playing and international relations. Marin Marais, Jean Rousseau, Christopher Simpson, and others recommended a "balanced" hand to best perform on the viol. Le Blanc insisted that the viol, with its tones that are "perfectly equal," demonstrates a happy medium between voice and resonance: a balance of the powers of sound.<sup>40</sup>

It was indeed the viol's sweetness and continuous sound that allowed it to overcome the shift away from consort playing that occurred in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The viol was reconceived as the unifying voice in a continuo group, or as an instrument capable of tenderly expressing song, or even as an instrument perfect for self-accompaniment when singing. As such, it continued to be cultivated by distinguished amateurs,

including the Dutchman Jacob Jan Hamel Bruyninx, who in 1699 assumed the duties of ambassador of the Dutch Republic in Berlin. His qualities as both a musician and a negotiator were praised in a letter by François d'Usson de Bonrepaus, Ambassador of France in The Hague, on May 29, 1699. Writing to his colleague Desalleurs, Ambassador of France in Stockholm, Bonrepaus gushed that Hamel Bruyninx:

is a very *honnête garçon*, and very agreeable, sings well, and plays to perfection the bass viol. He is also extremely intelligent in business. He was the secretary of the Dutch plenipotentiaries at Ryswick, which is what gave me the occasion to get to know him. You would give me pleasure, Monsieur, to bear witness to him that I recommended him to you.<sup>41</sup>

Bonrepaus's recommendation was not at all necessary. Hamel Bruyninx was headed to Berlin, after all, and not Stockholm. Additionally, he was a young man who had just begun his (lengthy) diplomatic career. His career had started, as many did, with on-the-job training as secretary to the Dutch ambassador in Vienna (1692–1694), of the Dutch Republic at the peace negotiations in Ryswick (1696–1697), and of the Dutch ambassadors in Paris (1698–1699) and Berlin (1699–1700). When the ambassador in Berlin was ill in 1699, Hamel Bruyninx assumed his duties, eventually receiving his official accreditation to the court of Brandenburg-Prussia in September 1700, before departing for Vienna three months later, remaining there as ambassador until 1732.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps Bonrepaus, an able diplomat, was able to see through his normal hatred of Protestants and realize that this young man would pursue a brilliant career.

Or perhaps, just perhaps, as this previously unreported letter indicates, it was the Dutchman's musical ability that lubricated their relationship. Hamel Bruyninx's competence in singing—and especially in playing the viol—impressed the Frenchman, who had likely heard him play and sing in The Hague or even in Paris. This rare insight into the music making of diplomats themselves certainly indicates that musical ability enabled negotiators in their boundary crossings.<sup>43</sup> Being able to speak an “international” musical language, understood at least by the French, created opportunities for Hamel Bruyninx. Thanks to Bonrepaus, he had a friend in Desalleurs—a relationship that undoubtedly attained more significance in future years, when Bruyninx represented the Dutch to the Holy Roman Empire and Desalleurs represented the French to the Ottoman Empire.

And now I would like to return to the point at which I began: Le Blanc's comment regarding the shared tone of viols and ambassadors. The second part of Le Blanc's book, from whence the anecdote derives, takes the form of a dialogue between Sultan Violin and Lady Viol. This is not just any dialogue; however, it is actually a staging of a diplomatic encounter. Sultan Violin recently arrived in France and has designs on the establishment of a universal monarchy. Not content with just Italy (the mythical homeland of the violin), he proposes invading Italy's neighbors to enlarge his empire and eliminate the viol. Le Blanc's choice of the title "sultan" firmly places the violin in an Orientalist category charged with tensions between East and West, between Christianity and Islam. His imperialistic desire to "enslave" the musical traditions on the French side of the Alps is tinged with the colors of Barbary Coast pirates and white slavery—despite the fact that Le Blanc himself might have witnessed a successful Ottoman embassy to France, led by Mehmed Efendi in the early 1720s.<sup>44</sup>

Described by Le Blanc as "an abortion, a pygmy," the primitive, hegemonic, non-European violin is placed in diametric opposition to the cultivated, natural, and balanced Lady Viol. Thus, we reach a point of contact with the conduct of international relations in the long eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Hegemonic power, like that desired by Sultan Violin, was seen as a product of political cultures too primitive to be able to conduct the resident diplomacy established by this period. At the same time, it soon becomes clear that Le Blanc's construction of the viol as cultured and natural bespeaks the sort of European universalism—based on notions of emulation and a shared artistic culture—propounded by political theorists of the day and practiced within the transnational networks of the newly emerged *corps diplomatique*.<sup>46</sup>

Le Blanc's narrative takes on a further diplomatic cast as the sultan holds council in an enormous hall of the Tuileries Palace. There, he asserts that he "would rather be destroyed than not be introduced to the greatest Christian Monarch."<sup>47</sup> Le Blanc's choice of the phrase "se faire introduire" in conjunction with the violin's sovereign title places this encounter in the sphere of diplomacy. The violin, even though primitive, seems well aware of the formalities associated with the ceremonial system of Western European diplomacy that was firmly in place throughout the long eighteenth century. The symbolic act of introduction in particular was an essential part of diplomatic ceremonial at this time. The initial reception by members of the foreign court, the length of time that representatives waited for their first audience, the quality of the introduction, and the

gestures given and received in the initial audience were all interpreted as portending the success or failure of future negotiations.<sup>48</sup> And yet, Sultan Violin has it wrong. He imagines having *himself* introduced to the King of France, when in fact it should be his *ambassador*. The Sultan's lack of cultural competence is a further indication of his primitivism. While he understands that a formal introduction is necessary, he does not yet fully comprehend the notion of representation at the heart of the European system of international relations. Coming soon to this realization, he turns to Messire Harpsichord and Sire Violoncello to act as his representatives and aid in his plan to drown out the sound of the viol.

And so Lady Viol arrives after a long absence from France—perhaps acting as a representative to a foreign court.<sup>49</sup> She finds that the world has changed and that she is no longer respected. Yet some remember her, and she still recalls the “sweet experience of being deliciously felt to pass beneath the royal bow.”<sup>50</sup> Encountering Sultan Violin at the door of the Concert Spirituel, a public concert hall, the two enter into a dispute in the style of a courtroom drama or, rather, a staged negotiation. That this occurs at the Concert Spirituel seems especially significant, given that the theater was often the only place where ambassadors in the midst of negotiations could be seen to coexist publicly.

The primary thrust of Le Blanc's staged dispute between the viol and the violin is on the quality of their sounds. The violin is too loud and lacks resonance. The viol has a delicate touch and a fine, resonant harmony. The violin is appropriate for large spaces; the soft voice of the viol for intimate chambers. The violin uses force, the viol—reasonable negotiation.<sup>51</sup> Thus the stage is set for the highpoint of Lady Viol's self-defense. In the midst of a digression on the sound of bells, Lady Viol responds:

that this *alta voce* much desired in a Clock for informing, becomes extremely disagreeable in an instrument played by a *galant homme* to entertain himself, and not to divert others; that the sound of the bass viol, resembling the tone of an ambassador's voice, which is not loud, and even a little nasal, is much more suitable; that the monarchs and princes of France have therefore sanely judged in favor of the viol, having given her place in their cabinet, in their chamber, close to their august person, while until now they have left the violin in the vestibule, or relegated it to the stairs, the stage of the loves of cats.<sup>52</sup>

Le Blanc describes two different performance situations here: in the first, a gentleman performs for his own pleasure. The comment about the ambassador's voice, as it follows directly upon the description of the self-diverting

gentleman, seems thus to refer specifically to this first situation, equating the *galant homme* with an ambassador. The second scene Le Blanc describes seems rather to depict the long-standing custom of sovereigns to retain chamber musicians specialized in the viol. In both situations, however, the viol is portrayed as close to the body of the sovereign, whether as a permanent fixture in the sovereign's most intimate rooms or in the hands of an elite who could be the sovereign's chosen ambassador. Indeed, when at home, ambassadors, like viol players, had unparalleled access to the body of the sovereign; when abroad, their bodies were transformed by the act of representation into the sovereign's own. And the act of representation, like that of producing sound on the viol, was one of performance.

As Le Blanc's comment indicates, ambassadors—and diplomacy itself—had a *tone*, a non-verbal element. Tone, like gesture, allowed for deliberate ambiguity in the performance of speech acts. The tone of an ambassador's voice—like that of an instrument that “speaks” without words—could just as easily be interpreted or misinterpreted by a listener. While such concerns of representation were undoubtedly pressing for the courtier striving to create a space for himself within the early modern court scene, they were magnified by the responsibility of an ambassador to represent the interests of the state.<sup>53</sup> Hence, careful dissemblance and control of tone was just as necessary to a satisfying performance of negotiations as they were to a concert on the viol. And the terms used to describe the character of the perfect ambassador come strikingly close to those to describe the sound of the viol, thus solidifying the bonds between the two: sweetness, agreement, delicacy, ease, balance, and civility.

The durability of the language superseded the instrument itself, which was susceptible to changes in both form and technique across this period and which became all but obsolete by the end of the eighteenth. This is the other end of Racy's dialectical process: “instruments may become vulnerable, marginalized, or even irrelevant.”<sup>54</sup> One could argue that the decline of the viol owes more to the disintegration of the ambassadorial social world that had sustained it than anything else. Above all, the viol and the social scene it had created among ambassadors was dependent on the restricted nature of social relations within the *corps diplomatique*—the closed meetings in intimate chambers, the quiet evenings of private music. As diplomacy became more “public” across the eighteenth century, the intimate tones of the viol were no longer meaningful enough. Rather, the loud voice of the violin—or the military brass band—became the favored mode of musical representation on the international stage.

## NOTES

1. "...tirant sur le Ton d'une voix d'Ambassadeur, qui n'est pas haut, & même nazarde un peu." Hubert Le Blanc, *Defense de la Basse de Viole, Contre les Entreprises du Violon Et les Prétentions du Violoncel. Par Monsieur Hubert le Blanc, Docteur en Droit* (Amsterdam: Mortier, 1740), pp. 80–81. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 3.
3. The pre-Rousseauian history of "universal music" has not yet been systematically explored. For recent developments in that direction, see Philippe Vendrix, *Aux Origines d'une Discipline Historique: La Musique et son Histoire en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 1993); Ellen R. Welch, "Constructing Universality in Early Modern French Treatises on Music and Dance," in *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Rebekah Ahrendt, Mark Ferraguto, and Damien Mahiet, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 103–123.
4. These circles may be qualified as an old conception of diplomacy. For the distinction between old and new diplomacies, see Damien Mahiet's Chap. 6 in this volume.
5. Ali Jihad Racy, "A Dialectical Perspective on Musical Instruments: The East-Mediterranean Mijwiz," *Ethnomusicology* 38(1) (1994): 38.
6. Maria Sonevitsky, "The Accordion and Ethnic Whiteness: Toward a New Critical Organology," *The World of Music* 50(3) (2008): 112.
7. Eliot Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," *Ethnomusicology* 56 (2012): 364.
8. Ian Woodward, "Material Culture and Narrative: Fusing Myth, Materiality, and Meaning," in *Material Culture and Technology in Everyday Life: Ethnographic Approaches*, ed. Phillip Vannini (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 60.
9. Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955; reprint, New York: Dover, 1988); Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion, 2010), Chapter 1.
10. Ian Woodfield, *The Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 86–87.
11. For an overview of Castiglione's thought, see Damien Mahiet, Mark Ferraguto, and Rebekah Ahrendt, "Introduction," in Ahrendt, Ferraguto, and Mahiet (eds.), *Music and Diplomacy*, pp. 4–6.
12. "Bella musica,—rispose messer Federico,—parmi il cantar bene a libro sicuramente e con bella maniera; ma ancor molto piu il cantare alla viola ... Ma sopra tutto parmi gratissimo il cantare alla viola per recitare; il che tanto di venustà ed efficacia aggiunge alle parole, che è gran meraviglia...."



- E non meno diletta la musica delle quattro viole da arco, la quale è soavisima ed artificiosa.” Quoted in James Haar, “The Courtier as Musician: Castiglione’s View of the Science and Art of Music,” in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), Appendix, example 3. My translation; “artificial” is here a term of praise.
13. William F. Prizer, “Una ‘Virtù Molto Conveniente A Madonne’: Isabella d’Este as a Musician,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17(1) (1999): 10–49.
  14. “Nous appellons violes c’elles desquelles les gentilz hommes, marchantz, & autres gens de vertuz passent leur temps... Ie ne vous ay mis en figure ledict violon par ce que le pouuez considerer sus la viole, ioint qu’il se trouue peu de personnes qui en vse, si non ceux qui en viuent, par leur labour.” Philibert Jambe de Fer, *Epitome Musical des tons, sons et accordz...* (Lyon: Michel du Bois, 1556), pp. 62–63.
  15. Laurent Guillo, “Les *Salmi cinquanta* de Philibert Jambe de fer (Genève, 1560) et les origines du psautier réformé italien,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme français* 156(3) (2010): 382.
  16. Ian Woodfield, “Posture in viol playing,” *Early Music* 6(1) (1978): 36–40. For histories of the viol beyond Europe, see esp. Yukimi Kambe, “Viols in Japan in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America* 37 (2000): 31–67; David R. M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
  17. Racy, “Dialectical Perspective,” p. 51.
  18. Tim Crawford, “Constantijn Huygens and the ‘Engelsche Viool,’” *Chelvy* 18 (1989): 41–60.
  19. A classic illustration may be found in Christopher Simpson, *The Division-Violist: or An Introduction to the Playing upon a Ground...* (London: William Godbid, 1659), p. 3.
  20. Georges Vigarello, “The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Civility,” in Michel Fehrer, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (eds.) *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, pp. 149–199.
  21. Herman Roodenburg, “Over scheefhalzen en zwellende heupen. Enige argumenten voor een historische antropologie van de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst,” *De zeventiende eeuw* 9 (1993): 152.
  22. “Je vous ay escrit devant mon départ d’Angleterre ... qu’un des premiers de la musique de Leurs Majestez ... avoit prins en charge et recommandation singulière la recherché des instruments d’eslite que désiriez avoir, lequel a recontré depuis ... un accord de six violes vieilles, mais des plus excellentes que l’on puisse trouver.” Letter nr. 1929, August 24, 1638, transcribed in Rudolf Rasch, ed. *Driehonderd brieven over muziek van, aan en rond Constantijn Huygens*, 2 vols. (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), I, pp. 296–298.

23. Letter nr. 2035, January 19/29, 1638/9, transcribed in Rasch, ed. *Driehonderd brieven over muziek van, aan en rond Constantijn Huygens*, I, pp. 299–301.
24. Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 45–57.
25. Leppert, *The Sight of Sound*, p. 45.
26. Shem Mackey, “A Question of Wood: Michel Collichon’s 1683 Seven-String Viol,” *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America* 47 (2012): 84–98; and “Michel Collichon, the seven-string viol and a question of wood,” *Early Music* 41(3) (2013): 439–445.
27. The bibliography on this topic is vast; for one perspective, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c.1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).
28. John C. Rule, “The Maurepas Papers: Portrait of a Minister,” *French Historical Studies* 4(1) (1965): 103–107; and “Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain et Maurepas: Reflections on His Life and His Papers,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 6(4) (1965): 365–377.
29. “il faut que le bois soit de la Chine, & qu’il ne soit pas trop lourd, parce qu’il rendroit la main trop pesante, ny trop leger, parce qu’il ne tireroit pas assez d’harmonie; mais d’une pesanteur proportionée à la main,” Le Sieur Danoville, *L’Art de toucher le dessus et basse de Violle* (Paris: Ballard, 1687), p. 11.
30. “il me semble que l’on met en usage plusieurs sortes d’autres bois pour faire des Archets, qui ne sont pas moins bons que le bois de la Chine,” Jean Rousseau, *Traité de la Violle...* (Paris: Ballard, 1687), p. 39.
31. “car si cela estoit, & que l’on n’eût plus de commerce avec les Chinois, il faudroit donc abandonner la Violle,” Rousseau, *Traité de la Violle*, p. 39.
32. For a recent insight, see Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
33. François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les Souverains* (Amsterdam: Pour la Compagnie, 1716), p. 19.
34. Antoine Pecquet, *Discours sur l’Art de Negocier* (Paris: Nyon, 1737), pp. 18 and 21–22.
35. “par sa douceur elle attendrit le son des cordes de fer, unissant par son son continu le son divisé des autres Instruments,” Danoville, *Art de toucher*, p. 14.
36. On the political dimension of concert, see Frédéric Ramel, “Perpetual Peace and the Idea of ‘Concert’ in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” in Ahrendt, Ferraguto, and Mahiet (eds.), *Music and Diplomacy*.

37. “Ceux qui ont ouy d’excellens ioüeurs & de bons concerts de Viols, sçauent qu’Il n’y a rien de plus rauissant après les bonnes voix que les coups mourants de l’archet, qui accompagnent les tremblemens qui se font sur le manche, mais parce qu’il n’est pas moins difficile d’en descrire la grace que celle d’vn parfait Orateur, il faut les ouyr pour les comprendre,” Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1636), II, p. 195.
38. “en quoi il faut que la raison et le iugement tiennent le gouuernail, aussi bien qu’en tout le reste des actions humaines,” Pierre Trichet, *Traité des instrumens* (ms, c. 1640), facsimile reproduction in *Méthodes & Traités I, Série I, France 1600–1800: Viole de Gambe* (Courlay: Fuzeau, 1997), p. 85.
39. Le Blanc, *Defense*, p. 107.
40. Le Blanc, *Defense*, p. 84.
41. “c’est un fort honneste garçon, et tres agreeable, chantant bien, et jouant en perfection de la basse de viole. Il est d’ailleurs tres intelligent dans les affaires. Il estoit secretaire des Plenipotentiaires hollandois au traite de Ryswick, c’est ce qui ma donné occasion de le connoitre. Vous me ferés plaisir M. de lui temoigner que ie vous l’ay recommandé,” Archives nationales, Paris, KK 1398, ff. 114v-115r, letter of May 29, 1699.
42. O. Schutte, *Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers, residerende in het buitenland, 1584–1810* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 139–140.
43. See also Chap. 6, by Damien Mahiet, in this volume.
44. See Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters. White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
45. My understanding of international relations has been significantly shaped by reading diplomatic papers and correspondence from the 1680s to the 1710s in the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Great Britain.
46. Mai’a K. Davis Cross, *The European Diplomatic Corps: Diplomats and International Cooperation from Westphalia to Maastricht* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
47. “il aimoit autant être anéanti que de ne pas se faire introduire chez le plus grand Monarque de la Chrétienté,” Le Blanc, *Defense*, pp. 31–32.
48. William Roosen, “Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach,” *The Journal of Modern History* 52(3) (1980): 452–476.
49. Women were invaluable to the diplomatic enterprise, though not officially appointed ambassadors until the twentieth century. See Anne-Madeleine Goulet, “The Princesse des Ursins, Loyal Subject of the King of France

- and Foreign Princess in Rome,” trans. Rebekah Ahrendt, in Ahrendt, Ferraguto, and Mahiet (eds.), *Music and Diplomacy*, pp. 191–207.
50. “la douce epreuve de s’être senti délicieusement passer pardessus l’Archet Royal,” Le Blanc, *Defense*, p. 59.
51. Le Blanc, *Defense*, p. 63.
52. “que cet *alta voce* très à rechercher dans une Horloge pour avertir, devoit très messéant [sic] dans un Instrument, dont joue un galant homme pour se desennuier, & non divertir les autres; que le Son de la Basse de Viole, tirant sur le Ton d’une voix d’Ambassadeur, qui n’est pas haut, & même nazarde un peu, étoit bien plus convenable; que les Monarques, & [81] Princes de France avoient sainement jugé ainsi en faveur de la Viole, lui ayant donné place dans leur Cabinet, dans leur Chambre, proche de leur auguste Personne, pendant qu’ils avoient laissé jusqu’ici le Violon au vestibule, ou relegué à l’escalier, Théâtre des Amours des Chats...” Le Blanc, pp. 80–81.
53. A point made by Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, p. 9.
54. Racy, “Dialectical Perspective”, p. 53.

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