PROJECT MUSE®

Francis Thynne's *Perfect Ambassadors* and the Construction of
Diplomatic Thought in Elizabethan England

Tracey A. Sowerby

Huntington Library Quarterly, Volume 82, Number 4, Winter 2019, pp. 539-557
(Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2019.0031>

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/753528>

Francis Thynne's *Perfect Ambassadour* and the Construction of Diplomatic Thought in Elizabethan England

Tracey A. Sowerby

ABSTRACT Francis Thynne's *Perfect Ambassadour*, written in 1578, is the earliest surviving English treatise on the role of the ambassador. Thynne's conception of appropriate diplomatic activity was influenced by historical precedent. Thynne drew directly on ancient Greek and Roman authors; he also included information about classical and medieval diplomacy derived indirectly from more recent publications, such as Theodore Zwinger's *Theatrum Vitae Humanae*. After briefly outlining the content of the treatise, Tracey A. Sowerby assesses the significance of Thynne's method and explains what it tells us about the mediation of diplomatic knowledge. Sowerby then compares it to other early modern diplomatic treatises and Elizabethan ambassadors' understanding of their activities. **KEYWORDS:** diplomatic handbooks; Tudor diplomacy; diplomatic poetics; Alberico Gentili; historical education

❧ IN 1578 FRANCIS THYNNE COMPOSED a treatise on the office of ambassador. *The Application of Certain Histories concerning Ambassadors and their Functions* was its title when it was printed for the first time in 1651.¹ It received a second edition

This essay forms part of a special issue: "English Diplomatic Relations and Literary Culture in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," ed. Joanna Craigwood and Tracey A. Sowerby, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2019). To read other essays in the issue, follow this link: <https://muse.jhu.edu/resolve/95>.

1. Francis Thynne, *The Application of Certain Histories concerning Ambassadors and their Functions* (London, 1651). Interest in Thynne's work at this time may stem from interest in the Cotton Library, where the publishers claimed to have found Thynne's work, for *Cottoni Posthuma: Divers Choice Pieces of that Renovvned Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton* (London, 1651) was published in the same year. No manuscript of Thynne's tract is known to survive, but the claim that it was part of Cotton's collection is plausible. Several of Thynne's works are extant in the Cotton manuscripts, and Cotton loaned out some of Thynne's writings to his friends. Given the high estimated rate of attrition of manuscripts from Cotton's library, it is possible that Thynne's

in the following year, when a new printer renamed it *The Perfect Ambassadors*, by which name it is most commonly known today.² By adopting this title, the publisher placed Thynne's treatise in a tradition of European writings on the ideal ambassador. Even before the French translation of Juan Antonio de Vera y Figueroa's *El enbaxador* (1620) was entitled *Le parfait ambassadeur*, writers on diplomacy understood the genre of diplomatic handbooks as one that, in effect, had come to deal with an ideal type. Hence Jean Hotman tried to distinguish his own treatise by writing in 1603 that he did not intend "to make a perfect *Idea* of an Ambassador, as *Tasso*, *Magio*, *Gentilis* and some others haue labored to do."³ Hotman's was just one of a large number of treatises on ambassadorial duties written in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While scholars have examined Hotman's tract and works by writers such as Ermolao Barbaro, Étienne Dolet, and Ottaviano Maggi, Thynne's treatise has received no dedicated study.⁴

As the earliest surviving English discourse on this popular subject, Thynne's treatise warrants closer attention, not least because it has the potential to reveal much about attitudes to diplomacy in Tudor England and about how they were formed. Unlike most early modern authors of diplomatic handbooks, Thynne had no personal experience of diplomatic service at the time that he wrote the work. Indeed, his inspiration for writing was apparently the disappointment of not accompanying an embassy in 1578.⁵ Thynne had been educated at Tonbridge School and had subsequently joined Lincoln's Inn, but by his own admission he "was never brought up in any Vniversitie."⁶ Nevertheless, the Inns of Court offered a humanist education by the time Thynne studied there.⁷ Thynne later discussed humanist works on the law with Thomas Egerton, his contemporary at Lincoln's Inn, suggesting long-standing

text was among those lost. See Kevin Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton, 1586–1631: History and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1979), 17–19, 55, 78; Harley MS 6108, fols. 151r, 161v, 162v, 163r, 166r, 173r, British Library, London [hereafter BL]; and Colin G. C. Tite, "Lost or Stolen or Strayed: A Survey of Manuscripts Formerly in the Cotton Library," in *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy*, ed. C. J. Wright (London, 1997), 262–306.

2. Francis Thynne, *The Perfect Ambassadors: Treating of the Antiquitie, Priveledges, and behaviour of Men belonging to that Function* (London, 1652). All subsequent references are to this edition.

3. Jean Hotman, *The Ambassador* (London, 1603), sigs. B7v–B8r.

4. See, for example, Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955), 181–91; Douglas Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy* (London, 2002), 108–27; Lucien Bély, "La polémique autour de *L'Ambassadeur* de Jean Hotman: Culture et diplomatie au temps de la paix de Lyon," *Cahiers d'histoire* 46, no. 2 (2001): 327–54; "Étienne Dolet on the Functions of the Ambassador," introd. Jesse S. Reeves, trans. James E. Dunlap, *American Journal of International Law* 27 (1993): 80–95; and Betty Behrens, "Treatises on the Ambassador Written in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *English Historical Review* 51 (1936): 616–27.

5. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. A2v–A4r.

6. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. A7v.

7. John H. Baker, *The Common Law Tradition: Lawyers, Books and the Law* (London, 2000), 3–28.

humanistic pursuits.⁸ His main interests lay in antiquarianism and alchemy. Best known for his contributions to the revision of Holinshed's *Chronicles* and his comments on Chaucer's works, Thynne became an active member of the Society of Antiquaries and composed a large number of antiquarian works.⁹

After his appointment as Lancaster herald in 1602, Thynne no doubt became familiar with some elements of diplomatic protocol, but there is no evidence that he had had any such exposure by 1578. Despite this, Thynne had sufficient confidence in his understanding of diplomacy to present his thoughts on the matter to William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who was an experienced diplomat and whose brother Henry had undertaken several missions to the Habsburgs. Cobham had served as part of a special embassy to the Holy Roman emperor in 1549, had been entrusted with the task of informing Philip II of the death of his wife, Queen Mary, in 1558, and had accompanied Sir Francis Walsingham on a special mission to the Netherlands in 1578.¹⁰ Thynne clearly believed that his opinions on diplomacy and the way that he had come to them would find favor with an Elizabethan ambassador. His confidence was to some extent borne out, for the work he composed closely resembled other diplomatic handbooks. It is precisely this fact that makes his treatise worthy of further investigation: how could someone with no formal knowledge of diplomacy write a tract that so closely resembled those by experienced diplomats?

Englishmen who wished to learn about the rules of contemporary diplomacy had few options in Elizabeth's reign. There was no formal training available—diplomats could only truly learn the intricacies of diplomatic practice in a diplomatic household, even if they might gain some insights by other means—and it is difficult to tell if the main Continental works on diplomacy were widely read in England. These texts are certainly not numerous in surviving inventories,¹¹ and in any case they gave only a partial picture of how diplomacy was conducted. The main sources

8. Louis A. Knafla, *Law and Politics in Jacobean England: The Tracts of Lord Chancellor Ellesmere* (Cambridge, 1977), 47–48, 69.

9. On Thynne, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter ODNB], s.v. "Thynne, Francis (1545?–1608)," by Louis A. Knafla, last modified May 27, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27420>; and David Carlson, "The Writings and Manuscript Collections of the Elizabethan Alchemist, Antiquary, and Herald Francis Thynne," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 52 (1989): 203–72. Despite Thynne's association with Chaucer, he does not appear to have drawn inspiration from Chaucer's work when writing the *Perfect Ambassadors*.

10. On Brooke, see ODNB, s.v. "Brooke, William, tenth Baron Cobham (1527–1597)," by Julian Locke, last modified January 3, 2008, [doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/61735](https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/61735); and David McKeen, *A Memory of Honour: The Life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham* (Salzburg, Austria, 1986). On his brother, see ODNB, s.v. "Brooke [Cobham], Sir Henry (1537–1592)," by Julian Locke, last modified January 8, 2015, [doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/5743](https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5743).

11. Only two of the booklists edited in the *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* volumes contained copies of Conrad Brunus's *De Legationibus*, and only one mentioned Alberico Gentili's *De Legationibus, Libri Tres* (*Private Libraries in Renaissance England: A Collection and Catalogue of Tudor and Early Stuart Book-Lists*, ed. Robert J. Fehrenbach and Elisabeth S. Leedham-Green, 9 vols. [Binghamton, N.Y., 1992–], 1:77, 5:114, 7:190).

of information available were accounts of diplomatic events in various forms of literature, including royal propaganda, festival books, and histories, not all of which provided reliable reflections of contemporary practice. Diplomatic tropes increasingly featured in drama, including several of Shakespeare's plays.¹² Analyzing Thynne's source material therefore provides insights into how he and his peers might have accessed diplomatic knowledge.

The need to understand the means by which nondiplomats encountered diplomatic information has been given new urgency by the growing scholarly interest in the relationship between early modern diplomacy and literary texts.¹³ Most notably, Timothy Hampton has demonstrated a profound link between the new and expanding practices of resident diplomacy and fictional composition. Hampton proposes that the "new diplomacy" of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries pervasively influenced the literary works produced by successive generations of writers across Europe.¹⁴ Several of the authors who have received renewed study through the lens of Hampton's "diplomatic poetics" were involved in diplomacy at some level, whether as ambassadors, secretaries, or hosts. Yet many writers who did not directly participate in international relations were also seemingly drawn to diplomatic tropes. This essay will offer some insights into the ways in which diplomatic knowledge circulated in Elizabethan England by examining the method Thynne used when composing his treatise and contextualizing his work among contemporary discussions of ambassadors by other English writers and by Continental theorists. Finally, it will ask whether such forms of diplomatic knowledge would have been recognizable to practicing Elizabethan diplomats.

Thynne's *Perfect Ambassadors* came to many of the same conclusions as a number of diplomatic handbooks that were written by experienced diplomats. It consisted of twelve chapters, each of which dealt with a discrete area. The first two chapters examined the origins of ambassadors. Thynne devoted his first chapter to the etymology

12. Carole Levine and John Watkins, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009), 51–78; Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009), 138–62; András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment: Drama and Political Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2016), esp. 89–133.

13. For example, Edward Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate: Culture, Politics, and Institutions* (Oxford, 2008); *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550–1700*, ed. Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani (Farnham, U.K., 2009); *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (Basingstoke, U.K., 2011); and *Authority and Diplomacy from Dante to Shakespeare*, ed. Jason Powell and William Rossiter (Farnham, U.K., 2013).

14. Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*. See also Hampton's "The Diplomatic Moment: Representing Negotiation in Early Modern Europe," *Modern Language Quarterly* 67 (2006): 81–102.

of the word *legate*, showing a humanist philological concern that was shared by other early antiquarians.¹⁵ While this helped to establish the Roman heritage of ambassadors, Thynne's second chapter provided a richer and older pedigree, arguing that the ancient Jews and Greeks had used ambassadors too. In the third chapter, Thynne turned to the character, status, and disposition of those who would make good diplomats. It was here that the main themes of his work began to emerge. The perfection of Thynne's ambassador was rooted in part in virtuous life and behavior:

THE person who ought to dispatch these things must be (as is requisite in all other causes of Government) learned, well born, free, no bond-man, of good credit in respect of his honesty, of good estimation in respect of his calling, that he be no lyar, vaunter, dissembler, or Traytor; But that he be wise, valiant, circumspect, furnished with divers Languages, eloquent, of quick capacitie, of ready deliverance, liberall, comly of person, tall of stature, and briefly that he be adorned with all vertues required, or commendable, in a good man, and unfurnished of any vice to blemish his credit, or that may win him the Surname of a wicked man.¹⁶

In his subsequent discussion, Thynne returned to these attributes, demonstrating the importance of a good education, rhetorical training, linguistic ability, and personal virtue in successful diplomatic practice. Throughout, he allowed that ambassadorial duties might be undertaken by a nobility of virtue rather than a nobility of blood, even if he thought it best that the two coincided.¹⁷ He also consistently emphasized the honor due to ambassadors, claiming that this had been recognized by societies over the previous two millennia; perhaps he was hoping to enhance the appeal of the tract to Cobham. In discussing the nature, birth, and personal qualities of the ambassador, Thynne's tract broadly resonated with other sixteenth-century treatises on diplomacy.

Further chapters of Thynne's work were dedicated to issues such as the wise and foolish sayings of ambassadors, ambassadorial immunities and breaches of them, the bad treatment and demise of diplomats, the treachery of ambassadors, and men who had served on multiple missions. Hence Thynne's work discussed key issues such as ambassadorial status, extraterritoriality, and appropriate ambassadorial conduct. Yet the earlier title of Thynne's work was the more accurate. *The Perfect Ambassador* largely consisted of historical exempla, ranging from ancient Greece to the court of the Holy Roman emperor Charles V, arranged around Thynne's twelve themes. Thynne's professed purpose was to "shew the original, Privileges, the Wisdom, the

15. For Thynne's interest in etymology, see Thomas Hearne, *A Collection of Curious Discourses Written by Eminent Antiquaries*, 2 vols. (London, 1773), 1:33–38, 2:24–25.

16. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. B4r–v. See also sigs. I8r–I9v.

17. See, in particular, Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. B4r–C2r.

Valour, the quick wits, & other the behaviours of Ambassadors, as examples for us in all respects to immitate,” not only “as they were in times past amongst the magnificent Romans in the midst of their greatest glory” but also “as they are now used.”¹⁸ Thynne did so out of a keen sense of the utility of apothegms and sententiae, explaining that,

because the best kind of perswasion, or chiefe rule whereby to square our life, either in following *Vertue*, or avoyding the *Vice*, in confirming in Morality, or instructing in Philosophie, is to bee drawn from the examples of others; therefore I will at this time . . . set down the Confirmation of the severall matters belonging to Ambassadors by examples.

His method, he claimed, was to “order, collect, and digest” stories about ambassadors “drawn out of many Histories, as if I had privately noted them for myself.”¹⁹ Thynne did so, as he believed in the educational value of history, writing that “wee can say no more than reasonable conjecture or former Authority may lead us unto.”²⁰ Certainly, Thynne’s *Perfect Ambassadors* reads as though it had been compiled from a diplomatically themed commonplace book with extracts arranged under appropriate headings. Yet Thynne went beyond a commonplacing mentality as he drew out the theories and principles underlying his selected examples, imposing order and meaning on the mass of material he had assembled, even if he largely did so only at the beginning and end of each section.

Educated early modern English people mediated their experiences of the world through their understanding of the past.²¹ Exemplarity, or *imitatio*, of historical cases was common among sixteenth-century humanists.²² Thynne’s contemporaries were encouraged to look to histories as a source of moral values, but this gradually shifted to viewing history as a source of practical, not merely moral, behavior.²³ They might, for instance, assess the significance of influential contemporary political figures or comment on their characters with reference to ancient politicians, or disguise criticisms of the current regime in historical plays or tracts.²⁴ Even the

18. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. A5v–A7r.

19. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. A7r, B1r–v.

20. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. A7r.

21. See, for example, Daniel R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. Paulina Kewes (San Marino, Calif., 2006); and Matthew Neufeld, “Introduction: Putting the Past to Work, Working through the Past,” ed. Neufeld, special issue, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76 (2013): 483–97.

22. See, for example, Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).

23. Woolf, *Reading History*, 79–131.

24. Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford, 2012), 216–54; Scott Lucas, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of the English Reformation* (Amherst, Mass., 2009).

way men and women learned to read encouraged them to see whole texts as potential sources for witticisms and pertinent examples that could then be redeployed in very different contexts.²⁵ Some individuals, such as Gabriel Harvey, approached historical works with a strong sense of the relevance of those texts to their contemporary circumstances and even engaged with the same text in different ways on different occasions.²⁶ Reading to be “studied for action” was common among those involved in commonplacing culture, and Thynne was no exception.²⁷ While many who compiled commonplace books used their selections to reflect on virtues and vices, some, such as Robert Sidney, were more interested in how exempla might provide lessons for analyzing current political situations and even predictive analysis of how certain scenarios might play out.²⁸ Still others saw no clear distinction between leisurely and pragmatic reading; instead, the desire to extract bon mots, reflect on moral action, or record enjoyable extracts from plays or prose works appears to have coincided.²⁹

As shall be seen, the *Perfect Ambassadors*, like with many commonplace collections, was compiled using writings from a range of genres, although historical works dominated.³⁰ Thynne had a long-standing interest in both commonplacing and historical writing.³¹ Moreover, when he needed to make amendments to a text, he annotated his source text quite extensively, as his notes on Holinshed's *Chronicles* suggest.³² Even when writing works arranged more along chronological than thematic lines, Thynne was selective in his redeployments. When composing new sections for the revision of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, for instance, he repackaged material from works by George Buchanan and John Leslie, in what Jennifer Richards has termed “rhetorical reading.”³³ In the *Perfect Ambassadors*, Thynne was also engaging in a rhetorical exercise: selecting material and rearranging it to illustrate the broader principle he wanted to make, whether it was that ambassadors should be treated with

25. William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2008), 3–67.

26. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” *Past and Present*, no. 129 (1990): 30–78.

27. For an overview of Thynne's works, see Carlson, “Writings and Manuscript Collections.”

28. Robert Shephard, “The Political Commonplace Books of Sir Robert Sidney,” *Sidney Journal* 21 (2003): 1–30 at 16–17.

29. Fred Schurink, “Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England,” in “The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England,” ed. Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink, special issue, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): 453–69.

30. See Adam Smyth, “Commonplace Book Culture: A List of Sixteen Traits,” in *Women and Writing c.1340–c.1650: The Domestification of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (York, U.K., 2010), 90–110.

31. See, for example, Stowe MS 1047; Cotton MS, Cleopatra C III, BL.

32. See Add. MS 39814, BL.

33. Jennifer Richards, “Rhetoric,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's “Chronicles,”* ed. Paulina Kewes, Ian W. Archer, and Felicity Heal (Oxford, 2013), 285–302 at 301–2.

honor and granted immunity or that only wise, virtuous men should be chosen to serve as diplomats.

Thynne compiled numerous historical collections around specific themes while he was an early member of the Society of Antiquaries in the 1590s and 1600s.³⁴ His other works demonstrated an interest in the officers of state, including the lord treasurer and earl marshal.³⁵ Thynne's tract on the duty and office of a herald at arms—written four years after his appointment as Lancaster herald—considered the origins of heralds, as well as such topics as how they were created and the particular tasks they might undertake, often with reference to specific precedents.³⁶ In contrast, Thynne paid little attention in the *Perfect Ambassadors* to the practicalities of ambassadorial life, probably because he had little access to such information.³⁷ Despite his opening acknowledgment that ancient Roman and contemporary practice differed, Thynne did not follow this distinction through in his text. He gave little sense of chronological developments, other than the emergence of resident ambassadors. He thereby created the impression that diplomacy was relatively unchanging, since the actions of ancient and medieval ambassadors were deemed appropriate for contemporary commentators and practitioners; this implication was starkly contradicted by the realities of early modern diplomatic service.

If Thynne did write the *Perfect Ambassadors* over Christmas, using the “Reliques of my spoyled Librarie,” as he claimed, then either he had quite substantial notes or the remnants of his library were still quite extensive, for Thynne used works by over forty authors in his treatise.³⁸ These were split roughly equally between classical and Renaissance authors, with a smaller number of medieval and Byzantine works included. Despite his declared admiration for the “magnificent Romans,”³⁹ Thynne did not privilege Roman anecdotes over other ancient exempla, nor did he draw any distinction between imperial and republican Rome. Perhaps most strikingly, although

34. On the early history of the Society of Antiquaries, see Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford, 1956); and Angus Edmund Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2010), 51–79.

35. Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton*, 55–56; Cotton MS, Faustina E V, E VIII, E IX; Julius C VIII, F VI, BL.

36. Stowe MS 569, fols. 237r–66r, BL.

37. Thynne's discussion of the lord chancellorship also lacks practical details: MS EL 26/A/6, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. I was fortunate to be able to consult this manuscript during a Mayers Fellowship and am grateful to the Huntington Library for its support.

38. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. I9r.

39. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. A6v. On the late Elizabethan interest in ancient Rome, see Paulina Kewes, “Henry Savile's Tacitus and the Politics of Roman History in Late Elizabethan England,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74 (2011): 515–51.

Thynne apparently viewed the *Corpus Juris Civilis* as the basis of international law, he freely admitted that he had not read it.⁴⁰ He did, however, favor exempla about the ancient world over those about the more recent past.

Unsurprisingly, Thynne's short discussion of the origins of ambassadors was based on ancient sources. It drew on works by Josephus and Herodotus in order to establish the pre-Roman ancestry of ambassadors.⁴¹ The chapters that dealt with issues with legal overtones, such as ambassadorial privileges or the violation of diplomatic immunity, also relied heavily on ancient exempla, many of which were taken from classical works. Thynne's examination of ambassadors who had been badly treated on embassy drew on works by Alexander ab Alexandro, Herodotus, Josephus, and Livy.⁴² Meanwhile, a chapter on the revenge exacted on princes who had treated ambassadors cruelly also invoked Josephus and Herodotus.⁴³ Many of the other anecdotes used in these sections also concerned incidents from the classical past but were sourced through more recent works. Thynne's discussion of the men suitable for diplomatic work was heavily reliant on ancient texts, with anecdotes drawn from Exodus and works by Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, and Eunapius.⁴⁴ Elsewhere in his treatise, Thynne relied on Plutarch's *Lives*. He used exempla from Plutarch's lives of Alexander, Anthony, Artaxerxes, Cato, and Pyrrhus to illustrate a range of precepts, focused on displays of wisdom; these are predominantly to be found in his discussion of wise sayings to and by ambassadors.⁴⁵ For Thynne, as for several of his contemporaries, Plutarch's *Lives* was a source of moral lessons.⁴⁶ Other classical authors, such as Alexander ab Alexandro, were a source of specific information, such as the reception of ambassadors by the Roman senate.⁴⁷

40. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. C2r.

41. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. B2v–B3v; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 5.100; Herodotus, *Histories* 3.122. Thynne also invoked 1 Maccabees 8:17; and Homer, *Iliad* 3.190–209. On the availability of works by these figures and other ancient authors mentioned in this essay, see Freyja Cox Jensen, "The Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1600," *Historical Journal* 61 (2018): 561–95. On Josephus specifically, see Freyja Cox Jensen, "What Was Thomas Lodge's Josephus in Early Modern England?," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 49 (2018): 3–24.

42. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. E3v–E4r, E5r–v, E7r–v, E11v–E12r; Alexander ab Alexandro, *Genialium Dierum Libri Sex* (Paris, 1561), 194a, 210a–211b, 252a; Herodotus, *Histories* 3.13.1–2; Livy, *Periochae* 67; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.13.4–10; Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 2.19.3.

43. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. F9r–F10v, F11v–F12r; Herodotus, *Histories* 5.19–21; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.5.2.

44. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sig. B8v; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12.1.35; Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, in *The Lives of the Sophists*, by Philostratus and Eunapius, Loeb Classical Library 134, ed. Wilmer Cave Wright (London, 1921), 393–99.

45. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. C12r–D1v, D2r–D3v, B9r, D5r–D7v; Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1914–26), 11.181; 7.391; 9.272–73; 9.387, 407–11.

46. Peter Burke, "A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1700," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 135–52 at 142–43.

47. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. C4r–C5v; Alexandro, *Genialium Dierum*, bk. 4, chap. 11.

Thynne also consulted several humanist histories. Many of these were written by Italian authors such as Pietro Bembo, Giovanni Michele Bruto, Girolamo Garimberto, Paulo Giovio, and Francesco Guicciardini; yet others were composed by German humanists such as Johannes Aventinus, Johannes Naclerus, and Johannes Sleidanus. He found many of these Renaissance histories to be useful sources for ancient precedents.⁴⁸ Many, however, did dual service, providing Thynne with examples from the more recent past too. Marcus Antonius Sabellicus's *Enneads*, for instance, provided Thynne with two Greek, four Roman, and four late medieval or Renaissance stories.⁴⁹ Other humanist histories were used more sparingly to illuminate medieval diplomacy. For instance, Antonio Bonfini was Thynne's source on Lombard practices, and Johannes Aventinus provided Carolingian and Gregorian anecdotes.⁵⁰ It seems unlikely, however, that Thynne was using many medieval works. Although he implied that he had read William of Malmesbury, his immediate source appears to have been Polydore Vergil's *De Inventoribus*.⁵¹ He did, however, draw on the *Suda* and works by Nikephoros, Niketas Choniates, Aimon of Fleury, and Paul the Deacon.⁵²

Despite his claim that his apothegms were drawn from histories, Thynne used a more extensive variety of texts when composing his work. He invoked Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* when discussing the power of eloquent oratory, and Seneca's sixth epistle provided a principle that steered the composition of the work as a whole: the way is long through precepts but efficient through examples.⁵³ In discussing the appropriate means of commemorating ambassadors who died while in service, Thynne distilled Cicero's ninth Philippic, which argued that Servius Sulpicius should be awarded a public statue by the senate even though he had not been slain by hostile forces.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, Thynne invoked Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and briefly quoted from Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁵⁵ For Thynne there was no clear distinction between the historical value of chronicles and histories, on the one hand, and classical treatises on oratory and poetry, on the other.

48. See, for example, Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. C8v–C9r; and Giovanni Michele Bruto, *Florentinae Historiae Libri Octo Priores* (Lyon, France, 1562), 376.

49. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. D2r–v, E8v–E9r, E9r–E10v, F2r–v, F4r–F5r, F5r–F6v, H10r; Marcus Antonius Sabellicus, *Opera M. Antonii Cocci Sabellici in Duos Digesta Tomos* (Basel, 1538), 40–41, 366–67, 395–96, 539, 639–40, 665–66, 840, 856–57, 866–67.

50. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. B6r–v, G11r–G12v; Johannes Aventinus, *Annalium Boiorum Libri Septem* (Ingolstadt, Germany, 1554), 360; Antonio Bonfini, *Rerum Vngaricarum Decades Quatuor* (Basel, 1568), 153–54.

51. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. G12v–H2v.

52. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. E11r–E12v, F2v, G10r–v.

53. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. B8v, A6r; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12.1.35; Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 6.5 (my paraphrase).

54. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. D11v–D12r.

55. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. B7r–v, G9r–G10v; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 5.346.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Thynne's rather expansive understanding of which works could be considered historical, he also gathered examples from early modern collections of *facetiae* (humorous sayings). Extracts from Lucius Domitius Brusonius's moralistic collection of witticisms supplemented anecdotes from Plutarch's *Lives*.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, four extracts from Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiae* injected some irony and humor. Three of these appeared in the short section on the foolish sayings and doings of ambassadors; they either showed papal diplomacy in a bad light or made a joke at the expense of an Italian ambassador—for example, mocking the Florentine diplomat who overstepped the mark by sexually propositioning Joanna of Naples, only to be told that she would only discuss the matter if it were part of his official instructions.⁵⁷ As this section comprised only six anecdotes and two further examples concerned Italian embassies, it painted Italian diplomats in a bad light. Indeed, implicit in much of Thynne's discussion of more recent diplomacy was a negative view of Italian diplomats. For instance, his sole use of Guicciardini's history of Italy illustrated the duplicity of ambassadors.⁵⁸ Thynne's sense that recent Italian diplomacy was less honorable than that conducted elsewhere was shared by other authors, such as Étienne Dolet.⁵⁹ Only one other group was depicted more negatively: Thynne's two examples of negotiations with Muslim powers involved Islamic princes who killed the Christian envoys who had been sent to them.⁶⁰

By the 1570s a range of printed commonplaces and florilegia had been published. Two decades earlier, John Foxe's *Locorum Communium Tituli et Ordines* (1557) had provided a list of texts that could be used as shortcuts by those collecting commonplaces. These included three popular compilations of classical philosophical, literary, and historical anecdotes: Aulus Gellius's *Attic Nights*, Valerius Maximus's *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, and Stobaeus's *Florilegium*. Foxe recommended using more recent compilations too.⁶¹ Thynne also recognized the utility of classical compilations of *sententiae* and used them to help furnish his text with pertinent examples. Indeed, Thynne turned to two of the same authors: Aulus Gellius provided

56. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. C10v–C12r; Lucius Domitius Brusonius, *Facetiarum Exemplorumque Libri VII* (Lyon, France, 1562), 58, 238–39.

57. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. H7r–H9r, H10r–v, H11r–v; Poggio Bracciolini, *The Facetiae, or Jocose Tales of Poggio*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1879), 1:166–68; 2:7–8, 201–3. The fourth extract was used to show ambassadorial wit: Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. D8v–D9r; Bracciolini, *Facetiae*, 1:150–52.

58. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. H3r–H4v; Francesco Guicciardini, *Historiarum Sui Temporis Libri Viginti* (Basel, 1566), 308.

59. "Étienne Dolet on the Functions of the Ambassador," trans. Dunlap, 88. Ironically, however, the other sections in which Thynne used several Italian anecdotes concerned the mistreatment of ambassadors and the honors due to ambassadors who died in active service.

60. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadors*, sigs. F5r–F6v.

61. Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996), 193–94.

Thynne with two examples of the impact of ambassadors' eloquence,⁶² and Valerius Maximus informed Thynne's discussion of diplomatic immunity.⁶³

Thynne accessed a greater array of contemporary works than Foxe had recommended, making full use of several recent collections of sententiae and more encyclopedic compilations, most notably Raphael Maffei's *Commentariorum Urbanorum* and Theodore Zwinger's *Theatrum Vitae Humanae*. Although Thynne predominantly used such compilations to provide exempla from the more recent past, he also saw them as useful sources for ancient precedents. Thynne excerpted five Roman, one Greek, and five nonclassical exempla from the *Commentariorum Urbanorum*, principally from the second book. Maffei's text provided anecdotes about John Colonna's expedition to Jerusalem; Francesco Dandolo's convincing the pope to forgive the Venetians through his excessive display of humility; the embassies of Gil Álvarez Carrillo de Albornoz on behalf of two fourteenth-century popes; Cardinal Bessarion's mission to Louis of France and Charles Duke of Burgundy; and Julian Cesarini's death on embassy to King Władysław of Hungary.⁶⁴ Thynne also used works by Pietro Crinito and Giles Corrozet.⁶⁵

In common with many other Renaissance scholars, Thynne clearly had no qualms about working with abridged or intermediary texts to access the classical past.⁶⁶ Yet there are indications that he was eager to demonstrate that he did not need to rely on such works, for on several occasions Thynne provided a reference to the original text from which his intermediary source had drawn its material. He was keen to suggest that he knew of Valerius Maximus's sources, for example.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, he demonstrated his knowledge that Sabellicus had used Plutarch's *Lives* of Cato and Sulla, as well as Herodotus, and that Paolo Giovio had used Sabellicus's histories.⁶⁸ In summary, Thynne's ideas about diplomacy were shaped by a wide range of classical and European texts.

62. Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. B8v, B9r-v; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* [*Attic Nights*] 6.14, 20.11.

63. Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. C6v-C7r; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium* [*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*] 6.4.3.

64. Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. D8r-D9r; I5v-I6r; E1r-v; D12v-E1r; Raphael Volterrano [Raphael Maffei], *Commentariorum Urbanorum Octo et Triginta Libri* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1603), sigs. Ll6r, F2v, L5r, Kk2r, M5v-M6r.

65. Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. B8r-v, H12r-v; Petrus Crinitus [Pietro Crinito], *De honesta disciplina* (Basel, 1532), 329-30; Gilles Corrozet, *Les divers propos mémorables des nobles* (Antwerp, Belgium, 1557), fol. 105v.

66. See, for example, Freyja Cox Jensen, "Reading Florus in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Studies* 23 (2009): 659-77.

67. See, for example, Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. C6v-C7r.

68. Thynne, *Perfect Ambasadovr*, sigs. D2v, E7r, F5r, F6v, H10r.

Thynne was not the only Tudor author to approach diplomacy historically, nor was he the only one to do so through intermediary texts. Short discussions of ambassadors and diplomacy were often included in works dedicated to the theme of honor, such as William Segar's *Honour, Military and Civil* (1602), which contained a short chapter on diplomats. This mainly discussed violations of diplomatic immunity and was based exclusively on ten classical precedents. Segar provided anecdotes seemingly drawn from Caesar's *History of the Civil War*, Pliny's *Natural History*, and Frontinus's *Stratagems*, which created the impression that a range of classical texts informed his discussion of ancient diplomacy. Yet much of Segar's material was taken without acknowledgment from the discussion of diplomatic immunity in Étienne Dolet's *De Officio Legati* (1541). He recounted many of the same examples that Dolet had used, predominantly in the same order, albeit interrupted by a short section seemingly of his own devising.⁶⁹ This suggests that, despite the paucity of examples from surviving inventories, Continental treatises on diplomacy such as Dolet's were circulating in England. It also indicates that some of Thynne's contemporaries had no scruples about basing their discussion of diplomacy on the work of others.⁷⁰

In contrast, *De Legationibus Libri Tres*, by the Italian civil lawyer and exile Alberico Gentili, provided an extensive original discourse on the role of the ambassador and the practice of diplomacy. Gentili's tract was published shortly after he and another civil lawyer, Jean Hotman, were asked for their opinions about how to treat Bernardino Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador who had been plotting against Elizabeth.⁷¹ Gentili's arguments were firmly grounded in Cicero, Livy, Sallust, Polybius, and a number of other ancient authorities, while book 2 of his work in particular, which discussed diplomatic immunities, drew extensively on the civil law.⁷² For Thynne, Roman exempla were just one source of historical precedents that could be used cumulatively to suggest more universal values and principles. For Gentili, by contrast, the Roman ancestry of much diplomatic praxis was significant: many essential features of the office of the ambassador and the institutional framework into which diplomacy

69. Compare "Étienne Dolet on the Functions of the Ambassador," trans. Dunlap, 91–93, or Étienne Dolet, *De Officio Legati . . . de Immunitate Legatorum* (Lyon, France, 1541), sigs. d1r–d3r, with William Segar's *Honor, Military and Civil, contained in foure Bookes* (London, 1602), sig. D2r.

70. For attitudes toward plagiarism in this period, see *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. Paulina Kewes (Basingstoke, U.K., 2003).

71. For an overview of their opinions, see Linda S. Frey and Marsha L. Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity* (Columbus, Ohio, 1999), 167–74.

72. Alberico Gentili, *De Legationibus Libri Tres*, trans. Gordon J. Laing (New York, 1924), 56–129. For Gentili's use of historians, see Kinch Hoekstra, "A Source of War: Gentili, Thucydides, and the Justification of Pre-emption," in *Alberico Gentili: La salvaguardia dei beni culturali nel diritto internazionale; Atti del convegno, dodicesima Giornata Gentiliana, San Ginesio, 22–23 settembre 2006* (Milan, 2008), 113–28.

fitted had their origins in Roman practice, and the exact nature and authority of that practice needed detailed consideration. Thus Gentili devoted whole chapters to specific aspects of Roman diplomacy, such as who in Rome had the authority to send and receive embassies (1.9), and he dismissed the notion (found in Tacitus) that ambassadors should be drawn by lot (1.10). This emphasis did not, however, prevent Gentili from drawing on more recent examples or contemporary literature when framing his arguments.⁷³

Another extended discussion of the role of ambassador written by someone with connections to English diplomacy was Jean Hotman's *Ambassador*, which took a slightly different approach to both Thynne and Gentili. Hotman had served as a tutor in the household of the English ambassador to France, Amias Paulet. Hotman's stated method when composing the tract was to have "borrowed from ancient and modern authors whatever I found to my purpose."⁷⁴ Hotman used a range of historical authors, including Commynes, Livy, Plutarch, Procopius, Suetonius, and Tacitus.⁷⁵ Several of Hotman's classical references, however, were to bon mots, or general moral points, rather than analyses of specific events. For instance, on several occasions he related precepts of statecraft from Cicero and used Seneca to outline the folly of excessive drinking.⁷⁶ One contrast between Hotman's work and other contemporary discussions of diplomacy was his extensive use of recent incidents to illustrate his more theoretical points. Hotman related anecdotes about two dozen sixteenth-century ambassadors from a range of countries, even to discuss areas that other writers more often illustrated with reference to Roman precedent.⁷⁷ Before Hotman, Ermolao Barbaro had been one of the few Continental writers on diplomacy not to make extensive use of classical writings.⁷⁸

Although Thynne never explicitly addressed ambassadors' education, implicitly embedded in the structure of his work was the belief that historical knowledge would benefit those serving as ambassadors. Other scholars considering the education of diplomats in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries explicitly deemed

73. For example, Diego Pirillo, *The Refugee-Diplomat: Venice, England, and the Reformation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2018), 98–117.

74. Jean Hotman, *De la charge et dignité de l'ambassadeur* (Paris, 1604), sig. π1v; quoted in Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 184. "Le sieur de Colazon," in *Notes sur vn petit liure premierement intitulé l'Ambassadeur* (Paris, 1604), accused Hotman of plagiarizing Carlo Pasquali's *Legatus* (Rouen, France, 1598). Colazon was probably a pseudonym for Pasquali. On Hotman's tract, see Bély, "La polémique autour de *L'Ambassadeur*."

75. Hotman, *Ambassador*, sigs. B4r, B6v, D2r–v, F3r, G7r–v, H6v.

76. Hotman, *Ambassador*, sigs. C3r, C6r, D5r–D6r.

77. See, for example, Hotman, *Ambassador*, sigs. G2r, E2r.

78. Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries*, 108.

historical study essential. Hotman believed that knowledge of histories was "more necessary" for an ambassador "than any other study," as it would "encrease in him, wisdom and iudgement in the affairs of his charge." Through "knowledge of the origine, continuance and ruine of kingdomes, countries, and townes," and by encountering "many examples of like accidents," an ambassador would not be surprised by the situations he encountered and would be able to assess them appropriately.⁷⁹ Another diplomatic commentator, Ottaviano Maggi, advocated that ambassadors should study the histories of both the most belligerent nations and the greatest empires and kingdoms, such as Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as the glorious deeds of brave men. He even went so far as to recommend the works of Thucydides, Herodotus, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, Appian, and Sallust.⁸⁰

Gentili had an even more developed view of the interrelationship between historical knowledge and diplomatic practice. Like Hotman, Gentili advocated the virtues of a historical education, repeating the platitude that "he who is skilled in history will know the past and have knowledge of the present." Gentili believed that the ambassador, by reading extensively in both ancient and modern histories, would be provided with both theory and practice; because he would "in a sense, be performing the duties of innumerable embassies," he could "emerge from the study not only with learning, but with skill in establishing a norm for his own conduct."⁸¹ In other words, historical knowledge could substitute for experience. With false modesty, Gentili asserted the value of his own work, which he had composed after only "a perfunctory and brief perusal of history." A more committed student of history could therefore make a great ambassador: "What then will one be able to do who will devote all his energies to this field and who on that account will cover a wider range of history and study it more carefully? I have no doubt that he will be an excellent ambassador even before he undertakes any kind of embassy."⁸² By this standard Thynne's work was perfectly acceptable as a guide to the behavior of contemporary ambassadors. Indeed, it was precisely his historical interests that qualified him to write on the subject.

Would contemporary diplomats have agreed? Thynne claimed to have been inspired to write the tract by conversations he had had with Cobham on the topic.⁸³ He included no obvious references to Elizabethan diplomatic practice or to Cobham's own missions, suggesting that the nature of his conversations with Cobham focused on historical matters rather than Cobham's experiences overseas. This raises the question: To what extent did active diplomats share Thynne's historical understanding of diplomatic principles and Gentili's belief that history provided a diplomatic

79. Hotman, *Ambassador*, sigs. B8r, C2r.

80. Ottaviano Maggi, *De legato libri duo* (Venice, 1566), sigs. O1r–O2r.

81. Gentili, *De Legationibus*, 153–55.

82. Gentili, *De Legationibus*, 154.

83. Thynne, *Perfect Ambassadovr*, sig. A5v.

education? Thynne's tract is also highly suggestive of the currency of historical, particularly classical, diplomatic exempla within diplomatic discourses.

It seems likely that many men, like Thynne, could have formed clear ideas about the principles and modes of contemporary diplomatic thought from the texts they encountered during their (largely humanistic) studies. This would have included many who would subsequently undertake diplomatic service. Many Elizabethan ambassadors used historical analogies when analyzing the state of international affairs or offering their ruler counsel. Just as domestic political figures were given classical nicknames, so too foreign politicians' ambitions, character, and actions might be intimated in diplomatic correspondence through parallels with historical figures. Hence John Knox could be figured as a latter-day Demosthenes and Lord John Hamilton as Scipio.⁸⁴ Historical analogies sometimes served as diplomatic shorthand. For instance, when Henry VIII's ambassadors in France reported in 1528 their belief that the Duke of Ferrara would be to the Apostolic See as Helen was to Troy, they expected Cardinal Wolsey to understand their implication: that while the alliance with Ferrara was seemingly attractive, it would incur the wrath of a powerful empire and ultimately ruin the papacy.⁸⁵ Similarly, Thomas Smith invoked Hannibal's condemnation of Phormio to imply that Jerome Osorius's tract exhorting Elizabeth to return to papal obedience was, while very eloquent, ultimately lacking in theological substance.⁸⁶ References to specific historical works performed a similar function. Philippe de Commynes's *Memoires*, for instance, could be used to suggest the consequences of the proposed interview between Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, or to comment on a prince's use of ambassadors.⁸⁷ Such analysis was no doubt encouraged by the fact that it was not uncommon for diplomats to be exhorted to invoke historical exempla during their negotiations. For instance, Daniel Rogers was exhorted to dissuade William of Orange from trusting Henry III of France by supplying him "out of histories with such examples as conteme the insolent dealings" of the French toward the Neapolitans, Milanese, and Sicilians; these examples implied that Henry could not be relied on to behave with any more honor toward the Dutch in 1575.⁸⁸

84. Nicholas Throckmorton to William Cecil, July 13, 1561, SP 70/28, fol. 40r, The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA]; *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603*, ed. Joseph Bain et al., 13 vols. (Edinburgh, 1898–1969), 10:755; 11:114.

85. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. John S. Brewer, Robert H. Brodie, and James Gairdner, 21 vols. (London, 1862–1932), vol. 4, pt. 2, 3956.

86. Thomas Smith to William Cecil, December 8, 1563, SP 70/66, fol. 35r, TNA: a reference to Cicero, *De oratore* 2.18.

87. Nicholas Throckmorton to William Cecil, May 22, 1560, SP 70/14, fol. 104v, TNA; John Mason to Thomas Chaloner, July 3, 1562, SP 70/39, fol. 11r, TNA.

88. Instructions for Daniel Rogers sent to the Prince of Orange, June 8, 1575, SP 70/134, fol. 102v, TNA.

On other occasions, diplomats made specific parallels in order to encourage the contemplation of the possible outcomes of a particular course of action. For instance, during negotiations with Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, in May 1588, Valentine Dale turned to Virgil's *Aeneid* as a means of understanding the political situation with which he and his queen were faced. He sent William Cecil, Lord Burghley, excerpts from Virgil that he believed "hath two notable poyntes, one for her Matie and one other for us." He had previously recited the passage for Elizabeth to her in person but believed that now it was time to put such sentiments into effect.⁸⁹ In July, Dale returned to Virgil to offer further counsel to Elizabeth. He transcribed three verses from Virgil and exhorted Cecil to get the queen to consider them, believing that reflections on the Trojan War—in particular on Diomedes's discussion over whether to wage war with the Trojans—held direct warnings for Elizabeth's policy in the Netherlands.⁹⁰ During this same mission, Dale remarked that the attempted secrecy of the Spanish preparations for war was not dissimilar to Henry VIII's lack of subtlety in his preparations to besiege Boulogne, and that Phormio's opinion of war held lessons for England's attitude to coastal defense.⁹¹ Such historical discourse was relatively widespread. In April 1560, Elizabeth's ambassador in France, Nicholas Throckmorton, used historical parallels to warn Cecil of the danger of French ambitions. He commented that, when contemplating England's position, they should consider a passage from Cato's speech in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*. In this passage, Cato warned of the dangers of showing mercy to internal enemies of the state. What gave the passage greater resonance was the sentence immediately before it—highlighted by Throckmorton—which made it clear that the putative internal enemies were plotting with the Gauls.⁹² This was, then, a coded warning that English men might join forces with the French to pursue the claim of the French queen consort, Mary, Queen of Scots, to the English throne. Some diplomats were not afraid to give such advice more publicly. Hence Thomas Wilson's translations of Demosthenes's Olynthiacs and Philippics drew explicit paratextual parallels between Athens and England, the Netherlands and Olynthus, and Macedonia and Spain to warn of the threat that Philip II's forces in the Netherlands posed to England.⁹³

Just as Thynne also drew on fiction when providing examples, ambassadors sometimes turned to fictional literature, and not just histories, when communicating coded messages to their peers. Contemporary political satires, such as pasquinades,

89. Valentine Dale to William Cecil, May 24, 1588, SP 77/3, fol. 372r, TNA.

90. Valentine Dale to William Cecil, July 12, 1588, SP 77/4, fol. 227r, TNA.

91. Valentine Dale to William Cecil, June 17 and July 12, 1588, SP 77/4, fols. 112r, 260r, TNA. From the context, the reference to Phormio is most probably to Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.81.

92. Nicholas Throckmorton to William Cecil, April 12, 1560, SP 70/13, fol. 81v, TNA. See Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52.22–29.

93. Alastair J. L. Blanshard and Tracey A. Sowerby, "Thomas Wilson's Demosthenes and the Politics of Tudor Translation," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 12 (2005): 46–80.

could serve the turn just as effectively as older, well-known texts, such as the works of Chaucer or ancient Greek plays, when diplomats wished to make a point but did not wish to write it openly.⁹⁴ Such practices were not limited to English ambassadors: allusions to the Spanish chivalric romance *Amadís de Gaula* became the center of a minor diplomatic incident in 1569, when English authorities thought that the Spanish ambassador, Guerau de Spes, had used these references to slander both the English queen and her principal secretary, in intercepted letters to Spanish potentates.⁹⁵

From reading various, largely historical, works, Thynne was able to construct a plausible theory of diplomacy that was fairly typical of the theories found in Continental diplomatic handbooks. This has important implications. Hampton is undoubtedly correct to suggest that the interest in diplomacy exhibited by a wide range of Renaissance authors was driven by developments in diplomatic practice such as the widespread adoption of resident ambassadors. Many of the authors Hampton studied were diplomatic practitioners; several had undertaken embassies. But he also argues for “a web of diplomatic discourse into which virtually every humanist-trained writer would have come into contact.”⁹⁶ Thynne’s tract offers useful insights into how non-practitioners might have engaged with diplomacy and suggests that we should not underestimate the impact of humanist influences and texts on the popular interest in diplomacy. Ancient moral and philosophical works, several of which Thynne cited, featured in the grammar-school curriculum, and a number of ancient histories were on university syllabi.⁹⁷ Chronicles were becoming more easily available, and in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the interest in and availability of ancient and Renaissance histories was increasing in England. So, too, was the enthusiasm for collections of sententiae and protoencyclopedia works. Diplomatic incidents littered many of the classical texts that Englishmen encountered during their education, as well as many more works that they could buy to read in their own time, and many of the compilations included sections dedicated to diplomacy. No doubt this interest was further spurred by a small but growing number of affordable tracts that recounted the exploits

94. See, for example, Thomas Challoner to the Queen, May 20 and December 19, 1563, SP 70/57, fol. 52r; SP 70/66, fol. 130r, TNA; draft speech of John Tayler, 1534, SP 1/84, fol. 201v, TNA; Christopher Mundt to the Queen, July 12, 1559, SP 70/5, fol. 126v; William Maitland to Nicholas Throckmorton, June 10, 1561, SP 70/28, fol. 32r; and Nicholas Throckmorton to William Maitland, June 30, 1561, SP 70/28, fol. 36r, TNA. Several ambassadors professed “Davus sum, non Oedipus” (I am Davus, not Oedipus) when they did not want to broach a topic.

95. Timothy D. Crowley, “Contingencies of Literary Censorship: Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy and *Amadís de Gaula* in January 1569,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 46 (2015): 891–926.

96. Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, 12.

97. Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London, 1965), chaps. 4–5; *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 3, *The Collegiate University*, ed. James K. McConica (Oxford, 1986).

of specific ambassadors or specific missions. Many men would not have read the range of texts that Thynne had, but they nonetheless would have encountered many similar events and ideas in their historical reading. Moreover, Thynne's emphasis on historical exempla was consonant with the approach taken by several former ambassadors. And it is perhaps even more telling that *The Perfect Ambassador* was still considered relevant in the fraught atmosphere of the Commonwealth, over seventy years after it was first written. A quasi-republican, regicidal government that could not automatically adopt the trappings of monarchy faced serious challenges in establishing its legitimacy on the international stage. At this moment, the publishers of the 1651 and 1652 editions, at least, believed that Thynne's 1578 manuscript, containing a historical account of ambassadors, still resonated.

TRACEY A. SOWERBY (University of Oxford) was principal investigator on two diplomacy-related projects, "Textual Ambassadors: Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World," funded by the AHRC, and "Centres of Diplomacy, Centres of Culture," funded by the British Academy. She is the author of *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England: The Careers of Sir Richard Morison c.1513–1556* (2010) and is co-editor, with Jan Hennings, of *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c. 1410–1800* (2017), and, with Joanna Craigwood, of *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (2019).