

ITALIAN LECTURE

Honourable Dissimulation: Some Italian Advice for the Renaissance Diplomat

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I WISH TO RECALL WITH GRATITUDE the name of Mrs Angela Mond, who in 1916 endowed the Academy's Italian Lecture, remarking in the relevant letter to Israel Gollancz that she thought 'special efforts should be made to further the appreciation in England of Italy's great achievements in literature, art and history'. It is pleasing to remember that then as now some of the fruits of commerce and industry were being channelled towards Italian, the poor relation of our modern language disciplines, paradoxically charged with celebrating the richest of all European cultures.

Let me offer a thread through the labyrinth which follows. In popular etymology, diplomacy and duplicity are associated through a common root in the Greek διπλός. The diploma was the folded paper accrediting or granting privileges to Roman legates or Imperial envoys, and *duplicitas* seemed to characterise the ambiguous or two-fold quality of the profession. Scientific etymology may deny the link, but it is a truism that in an expression such as 'diplomatic language' the adjective implies not only 'inoffensively polite' but also 'deceitful'. In my present conversation, I wish to explore the concept of dissimulation as it developed during the sixteenth century in Italy, from its earlier amoral associations to the view that dissembling fulfils a useful social function.

Alfred Hitchcock used to say that he made cameo appearances as early as possible in his films so that the audience, having spotted his

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portly profile, might settle back and follow the plot. In the same spirit, anticipating the expectations of some in my audience, I offer as a preliminary the dictum of Sir Henry Wotton, whose impressive figure will, I hope, link the various parts of this paper:

An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for his country.

That, at least, was the translation suggested by Wotton's splendid biographer, Izaak Walton,¹ based upon an original Latin inscription which Wotton had left in Christopher Flecamore's visitors' book while pausing at Augsburg en route for his first Ambassadorship to Venice. Unfortunately for Wotton the pun disappears in Latin. What he probably wrote was:

Legatus est vir bonus peregre missus ad mentiendum Reipublicae causa.

The play on 'lying abroad' is lost in the bleak frankness of 'mentendum'. Nevertheless, Wotton could have had no suspicion that the offending sentence would ever affect his future. Indeed, statements of a far more undiplomatic kind were openly to be made in subsequent years and in allegedly diplomatic manuals. One, purporting to be by Cardinal Richelieu,² clearly states:

But ambassadors may, without scruple, disguise the truth. Having received their instructions, it is not permitted them not to follow 'em; this would be to betray their Master, and to fall into an unpardonable crime.

The words merely sum up what had been taken for granted for centuries, and the book, *The Art of Pleasing in Conversation*, is itself a good example of commercial dissimulation, the name of Richelieu being a typical ploy, a fake author to make the volume more saleable. The real author, P. d'Ortigue de Vaumorière, proceeds to remark on the ability of clever people to dissimulate:

I confess they are more capable of dissembling than your gross, dull people; and therefore it is we see less sincerity at court than in the country; and not far off there's a subtilized sort of people (*Italians*) whose words are not greatly to be relied on.

In view of the advice in the rest of the volume it is difficult to know

¹ Izaak Walton includes Wotton in his exquisite quartet of brilliant contemporaries, *The Lives of Dr John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr Richard Hooker, Mr George Herbert* (London, 1670), p. 38 (hereafter Walton).

² *The Art of Pleasing in Conversation*, written by the famous Cardinal Richelieu (London, 1722); reprinted by Mr Ozell in 2 vols. (London, 1736), here vol. I, p. 181 and p. 185.

whether that last statement is a compliment or an insult. Those same Italians had, anyway, taught Europe the diplomatic art, and it was from Italian handbooks that much diplomatic lore was spread abroad.

The pun on lying abroad, in Walton's words, 'slept quietly among the Sentences in this *Albo* almost eight years'.³ It surfaced again to haunt Wotton in 1612, on his return from another spell as Ambassador to the Serenissima. At that time of fierce religious conflicts, the attention of the German classical scholar, Gaspar Schoppe was drawn to the unfortunate inscription. Schoppe, or Scioppius as he was then better known, had himself abjured protestantism, and, with the fanaticism of a convert, used Wotton's dictum, along with other calumnies, as propaganda to emphasise the untrustworthiness of the protestant cause, and, in particular, to attack James I. Windows in Venice were engraved with the quotation blatantly now attributed to Sir Henry.⁴

Wotton's return to London that year coincided with the death of Robert, Earl of Salisbury, the King's first minister, and Wotton might have expected to become Secretary of State. Instead the King demanded an explanation and a defence of the sentence, quoted by Scioppius. Sir Henry's diplomatic skills and a particular friendship with James, aided by two letters of apology and a leaflet campaign, enabled him to parry the attacks. But the double commitment of observing the Italian political scene and attending, at a distance, to his status at the English court, etiolated his own powers; rivals, grown stronger during his long absences in Italy, succeeded in preventing his elevation and recited against him his most famous saying.

Wotton was by nature a stoical sort of man, one of the prime psychological requisites for survival and sanity in a Renaissance courtier-cum-diplomat, and eventually he came to refer jestingly to Scioppius and to his own maxim for ambassadors. He never entirely lost King James's favour and he was sent as Ambassador to Venice intermittently until 1624 when he was able to retire from the diplomatic service and, after devious negotiations, take up the Provostship of Eton. I shall return later to this fascinating figure; he had learned many diplomatic ploys from his Italian hosts and these become relevant to my theme.

Wotton's dictum is cited briefly by Garrett Mattingly in the best

³ Walton, p. 39.

⁴ One version of the famous inscription is visible in G. Schoppius, *Oporini Grubini Legatus Latro* (Ingolstadt, 1615), p. 67: 'Legatus Calvinianus, maxime Anglicanus, est vir bonus peregre missus ad mentiendum et latrocinandum suae Reipublicae causa'.

modern discussion of Renaissance diplomacy yet to appear.⁵ It is still a stimulating and profitable experience to read his volume of that title, published nearly forty years ago now. When Mattingly is well into his stride he pauses (at page 115) to reflect upon what he terms the practice of the diplomatic profession:

No matter with what air of discovery or paradox it is paraded, or with what personal experiences illustrated, it boils down to the same scanty residue of what seem like the tritest platitudes.

It is not difficult to understand the motive for Mattingly's slightly frustrated, slightly apologetic tone. In the thousands of diplomatic and courtly manuals published after Castiglione's pioneering exemplar in 1528, trite platitudes abound. They continue nowadays in the hundreds of business manuals designed to speed ambitious executives along their career-track. I note for your edification *Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun* and *Strategy of the Dolphin*.⁶ North America alone produces a score of these handbooks each year. And nearly all this aphoristic wisdom, *mutatis mutandis*, is perceptible in earlier writers from Homer onwards. Those scholars who have wanted to take the trouble have found commonplaces in the most original-sounding discourses, not least in Castiglione and Machiavelli. Indeed, as I hope to show, it was their ability to re-work commonplaces which enhanced the originality of their thought.

There may seem to be a danger here in equating the skills of a Renaissance courtier with those of his diplomatic confrère. But there is no contradiction; indeed it is surprising that Garrett Mattingly does not mention Castiglione's masterpiece as a potential diplomatic manual. Great courtiers were often successful diplomats and vice versa, Baldesar Castiglione being the supreme example, and Wotton, despite his thwarted, if unstated, ambition, another case in point. The latter has a useful reflection, in his commonplace book,⁷ on the distinction between courtiers and diplomats:

⁵ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955).

⁶ Wes Roberts, *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (New York, 1990) (since the first delivery of this paper I have to record a sequel, entitled *Victory Secrets of Attila the Hun* (New York, 1993)); Dudley Lynch and Paul L. Kordis, *Strategy of the Dolphin* (London, 1989). Despite my levity, this last volume reflects curiously some of the Aristotelian concepts manipulated by Castiglione.

⁷ The commonplace book, *Table Talk*, kept in Wotton's house in Venice, is published as Appendix 4 to Logan Pearsall Smith's magisterial study and edition, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (Oxford, 1907), 2 vols., here vol. II, pp. 489–500 (hereafter this edition will be referred to as L.P.S.). I must here declare my debt to and admiration for Pearsall Smith's invaluable work.

Court motions are up and down, ours circular; theirs, like squibs cannot stay at the highest nor return to the place whence they rose from, but vanish and wear out in the air; ours like millstones busy without changing; they fortunes, we vicissitudes.

There are other entries in Wotton's commonplace book which will be worth recalling later; by definition many fall into Mattingly's category of platitude but their blend of concision, familiarity and originality of expression lend them enchantment.

There are several good reasons for the enduring interest in such platitudes. Natural curiosity and a fascination with the secrets of a great diplomat or courtier ensured profitable posthumous editions of such works as Burleigh's *Precepts*, or Walter Raleigh's *Instructions*.⁸ Understanding the way in which those ground rules operated permits the reader to contemplate, as an insider, the spectacle provided by such gladiators of diplomatic history, and to estimate the success or failure of their ambitions and aspirations. That interest is heightened because there we see, writ large, our personal subjection to the whims of fortune as well as to more obvious physical forces. We all participate to a greater or lesser extent in a struggle to control our destinies and to achieve happiness, however we define that word. Above all, in the distilled wisdom of experienced practitioners, the ambitious or the anxious may find instant answers to their own problems. Belief in that illusion has always proved an added reason for the popularity of such manuals.

Renaissance Italy produced two market-leaders in the genre, Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* and Machiavelli's *Prince*.⁹ The two books date from around 1512–13 in their original format and were published within four years of each other in 1528 and 1532 respectively. Both are crammed with distilled wisdom which it is possible to adapt to the most everyday circumstances. Evidently the private citizen cannot normally have the direction of an army or convene a Royal Court gathering (despite the pretensions of some First Secretaries) but, underlying the more obvious power and privilege of princes in Castiglione and Machiavelli, is advice which may be adapted to other situations. In

⁸ Lord Burleigh (Henry Cecil), *Precepts or Directions for the Well Ordering and Carriage of a Man's Life* (Edinburgh, 1618); Walter Raleigh, *Instructions to his Sonne and to Posteritie* (London, 1633) (3rd and corrected edition).

⁹ Baldesar Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, available in Bruno Maier's edition (Turin, 1964) (2nd ed.); Niccolò Machiavelli, *De principatibus*, available in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Guido Mazzoni and Mario Casella (Florence, 1929), pp. 1–51 (hereafter *Il principe*).

particular, one constant, both in those two volumes and in every other diplomatic manual that I have read, is the suggestion that dissimulation can succeed where force may fail. The recent publishing success of the *Penguin Book of Lies* may indicate that there is something intrinsically attractive about dissembling.¹⁰ Castiglione is more subtle than Machiavelli and his *disinvoltura* (casualness, insouciance) was popularly, and mistakenly in my view, treated as a superficial quality, akin to and part of grace and elegance, though that 'casualness' is and always has been one of the key stratagems of our own Foreign Office. Essentially, Castiglione's *disinvoltura* veils the true potential of its practitioner. Less subtle, more direct and, above all, expressed in a brilliant new dilemmatic style, was Machiavelli's advice on dissimulation:

You must be a great simulator and dissimulator: men are so simple-minded and so obedient to the needs of the present that the deceiver will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived.¹¹

Machiavelli could not resist here the temptation of giving the example of Pope Alexander VI, Roderigo Borgia, his supreme model of the confidence trickster who knew that there was a dupe born every minute. That kind of remark ensured for Machiavelli a high position in the league table of the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. Thus by 1592 his works were not readily available for Henry Wotton who wrote from Florence ('a paradise inhabited with devils') to Lord Zouche that he was hoping to find 'Machiavil's Tales and certain other works of his not commonly seen'. Sir Henry knew Machiavelli's work, though the only attributable quotation I have found from him is in the commonplace book kept in his house in Venice: 'Leagues and contracts of Princes last no longer than the causes for which they were made. Mach.'¹² After his experience with Scioppius, Wotton was, without doubt, in Izaak Walton's words, inclined 'for the future to become more industriously watchful over his tongue and pen',¹³ and disinclined

¹⁰ Ed. Philip Kerr (London, 1990). Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), has in recent years achieved similar popularity, and, contemporaneously, in Italy Salvatore S. Nigro's brief anthology, *Elogio della menzogna* (Palermo, 1990), picked up the theme and contains a neat bibliography (pp. 26–7).

¹¹ *Il principe*, vol. XVIII: 'È necessario (. . .) essere gran simulatore e dissimulatore; e sono tanto semplici gli uomini, e tanto obediscono alle necessità presenti, che colui che inganna troverà sempre chi si lascerà ingannare'.

¹² L.P.S., vol. I, p. 281, and vol. II (Appendix 4), p. 491; cf., below, n. 16.

¹³ Walton, p. 40. Two years later Wotton noted 'John Hoskins to his little child Benjamin from the Tower:

to put on paper potential hostages to fortune. The aphorism noted in Wotton's commonplace book is not untypical of Machiavelli's uncompromising advice.

Garrett Mattingly tries to explain away as satirical Machiavelli's amoral statements. Thus the *Prince*, in Mattingly's view, was nothing less than a satire on tyranny. Now, while I am not wholly unsympathetic to that idea, I would find it difficult to account for Machiavelli's folly at producing such a satire and presenting it to the Medici Prince who a few months before had caused him to be imprisoned and tortured. Could Machiavelli, I ask myself, have been so naïve? The answer may well be that he was. Matteo Bandello, the renowned Mantuan chronicler and story-teller, addresses one of his novellas to Giovanni delle Bande Nere, the Medici condottiere who did much to restore the family fortunes before his death in 1526. Bandello is anxious to ingratiate himself or at least to share the reflected glory of the illustrious Medici leader, and he spends considerable time talking confidentially with him of the difference between words and action, practicality and theory. He introduces a cautionary tale about 'our ingenious Messer Niccolò Machiavelli' during the siege of Milan:¹⁴

Messer Niccolò kept us waiting in the sun that day for more than two hours while he tried to draw up 3,000 infantry according to the rules he had noted (in his *Art of War*), and he never succeeded. And yet he spoke so well, so clearly and demonstrated verbally that the thing was so extraordinarily easy that I, ignorant in such matters, was convinced as I listened to his reasons and his discourse, that I could have easily drawn them up myself.

The outcome is that Giovanni delle Bande Nere turns to Bandello and says he is tired of the weary delay, he wants his dinner, and, in the twinkling of an eye, with a roll of drums he draws up the soldiery, to the great admiration, remarks Bandello, of all who were there.

Sweet Benjamin, since thou art young
And hast not yet the use of tongue
Make it thy slave while thou art free
Imprison it, lest it do thee'.

Letters of Sir Henry Wotton to Sir Edmund Bacon (London, 1661), p. 141 (Hoskins was imprisoned in the Tower in 1614).

¹⁴ Matteo Bandello, *Tutte le opere*, edited by Francesco Flora (Milan, 1949), Prima parte (Novella 40), p. 464: 'Messer Niccolò quel dì ci tenne al sole più di due ore a bada per ordinar tre mila fanti secondo quell'ordine che aveva scritto, e mai non gli venne fatto di potergli ordinare. Tuttavia egli ne parlava sì bene e sì chiaramente, e con le parole sue mostrava la cosa esser fuor di modo sì facile, che io che nulla ne so mi credeva di leggero, le sue ragioni e discorsi udendo, aver potuto quella fanteria ordinare'.

It is not fashionable nowadays to speak ill of Machiavelli. In modern politics the ends are admitted to justify the means, though some Home Secretaries might hesitate at condoning fratricide in the interests of national unity. But even adverse critics of Machiavelli talk about his political realism, basing their verdict on certain uncompromising aphorisms:¹⁵ 'You must learn how not to be good', 'Nothing consumes itself like liberality', 'Safer by far to be feared than to be loved', 'A man forgets the death of his father before the loss of his patrimony', 'A prudent ruler cannot and must not keep faith'. There are many other more ruthless examples too extended to be comprehended in single aphorisms. But this is not to say that a political realist is a realistic politician. On the contrary, in Machiavelli's case all the evidence points to his being completely out of touch with the way events were moving between the crucial years 1500 and 1520.¹⁶

Whatever our view of Machiavelli and whatever critical view is held of his *Prince*, the truth remains that many of its aphorisms were treated as ground-rules for diplomacy during succeeding centuries. The major importance of his work lay, I believe, in the way Machiavelli enshrined, in a prose style which rivals Francis Bacon's for novel beauty, truths which had been accepted, not always tacitly, for centuries: that the word of an opponent cannot be trusted, and that fortune favours not only the brave but also the unscrupulous. The printed word sanctioned what had become accepted as unacceptable, and encouraged some to behave more unscrupulously, and others, the more ingenuous perhaps, to be more on their guard. The dilemmatic method of argument used in the *Prince* also makes the reader feel confident that a definitive answer is possible, even though after rigorous examination this may prove vacuous, as Anglo has shown. Only in one positive way, I believe, did it point the way ahead: its clarity and frankness left no doubt in the mind, and thus cleared the decks ready for a new breed of politician-diplomat whose subtlety would make Machiavelli

¹⁵ *Il principe*: 'Onde è necessario a uno principe, volendosi mantenere, imparare a potere essere non buono' (XV); 'E non vi è cosa che consumi se stessa quanto la liberalitate' (XVI); 'E molto più sicuro essere temuto che amato' (XVII); 'Gli uomini sdimenticano più presto la morte del padre che la perdita del patrimonio' (XVII); 'Non può, pertanto, uno signore prudente, né debbe, osservare la fede' (XVIII). Aphorisms, as here, often ignore qualifying statements, but the stark lines are those immortalised; for a counter to this attitude and an emphasis, rather, on the qualifying statements, see J. H. Whitfield, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1947).

¹⁶ Sidney Anglo, *Machiavelli* (London, 1969), has given the most unbiased account of Machiavelli's 'realism' or otherwise.

seem crudely medieval by comparison, and, of course, it offered to power-brokers immortal advice on dissimulation:

One must, therefore, be a fox to recognise the snares and a lion to scare off wolves. Those who rely on the lion alone understand nothing. It follows then that a prudent prince cannot and must not keep faith when it is against his interests, and when the reasons for making the pledge are no longer operative. If all men were good this would not be a good precept, but because they are evil and would not keep a pledge to you then you also need not keep yours to them.¹⁷

That advice would have seemed another platitude for Machiavelli's contemporaries, yet it had a directness and power thanks to his new prose style. Similarly another piece of advice, which had been current for centuries, was given new life by Machiavelli's brilliant style. I refer to his counsel that personal qualities or virtues may be trained to seize the occasions which fortune offers and that, although fortune is ultimately unbeatable, nevertheless the well-prepared individual may have a better chance than most. Fortune, in Machiavelli's famous image, is likened to a flooded river which turns its destructive power on those weakest parts of the banks unprotected by dykes and levees. The maleficent effects of the flooding and of fortune, may be mitigated by adequate preparation, scrupulous or otherwise. Such preparation forms the subject of Castiglione's treatise, though in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* Machiavelli's sometimes melodramatic advice on fiery youthful virtues gives way to a more serene preparation in diplomatic skills, where virtue is often replaced by virtuosity, and where the image of a young man beating and crushing Fortune as though she were a woman, gives way to Castiglione's assiduous cultivation of an institution wherein power lies. Persuasion and not violence dominate in Castiglione's measured volume, but violence is so much more appealing, and has had a greater vogue. Yet Machiavelli's view, taken over from centuries of similar advice and more recently from Leonbattista Alberti was understandable. His models for the *Prince* had been the despotic leaders of previous centuries and earlier civilisations; by 1500 such despotic initiatives no longer guaranteed political success. The

¹⁷ *Il principe*, XVIII: 'Bisogna, adunque, essere golpe a conoscere e' lacci, e lione a sbigottire e' lupi. Coloro che stanno semplicemente in sul lione non se ne intendano. Non può, pertanto, uno signore prudente, né debbe osservare la fede, quando tale osservanzia li torni contro e che sono spente le cagioni che la feciono promettere. E se gli uomini fussino tutti buoni, questo precetto non sarebbe buono; ma perché sono tristi, e non la osserverebbero a te, tu etiam non l'hai ad osservare a loro'.

French had invaded Milan and Lombardy in 1499 and had imposed what they hoped would be a more placid regime based on dynastic succession, not despotic usurpation. By 1520 Spain was to assert her imperial power and influence, and set in place her own dynastic puppets. By 1527 the peninsula was awash with foreign troops; Rome itself was sacked by the mercenaries of the Holy Roman Emperor. For the next three hundred years Italy would be exploited by foreign imperial powers, and, in a citizen's private behaviour, much of Machiavelli's unscrupulous advice would have seemed sound good sense.

Yet in the fifteenth century Italy had seen a remarkable balance of power between rival city states within the peninsula.¹⁸ There were no religious conflicts of the dimension of Catholic versus Protestant, no major ideological struggles. Those two factors: a balance of power and a lack of ideological conflict, provided a fertile field for the diplomat to operate successfully and profitably. So that by the time of the French invasions of 1494 and 1499 the communes of Italy had developed a considerable experience of negotiating amongst themselves on questions of boundaries, power, prestige and privilege. For two centuries or more, clever, practical Italian merchants and merchant bankers had been weighing up market situations and assessing the quality of their mercantile opponents. Consider the profiles of those merchants who commissioned Mantegna or Masaccio or Piero della Francesca, and try to imagine for a moment getting a bargain from them. The most successful of these merchants during the whole of the fifteenth century represented Florence and Venice. Who better than such men to bring or send reliable information to their communes and to negotiate with neighbouring states over diplomatic issues? The Medici at Florence, for instance, provided not only international banking but also the effective government of the state. It was in the private and public interest of the family to produce successful results. In Venice, too, the oligarchical system depended upon a co-operative network amongst merchant families, who, at least *vis-à-vis* the world outside, were united in promoting their Republic.

The rest of Europe lagged behind Italy in diplomatic skills as in all other civilised arts. Only when frontiers and dynasties were as settled in Europe as they had been in fifteenth-century Italy could European

¹⁸ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, edited by C. Panigada (Bari, 1929) (5 vols.), vol. I, p. 2, gives with hindsight an idealistic view of the state of Italy in the fifteenth century which reflects, at least, the balance of power.

diplomacy develop. In the meantime, and rather obviously, the European Powers relied upon their military force. The Italian city-states, believing that they could make up in guile what they lacked in physical terms, more and more applied dicta like Machiavelli's aphorism concerning lion and fox. Hence, during the rest of the sixteenth century their diplomatic methods gained for some of them the reputation for shiftiness and duplicity, which is often referred to in English manuals. Italians were becoming mercenaries of diplomacy (employed for instance by Henry VII and Henry VIII) as they had been military mercenaries a century before. And Machiavelli, banned in Catholic countries for his anticlericalism and treated in Protestant countries as a Papist Antichrist, acquired the reputation he enjoys in Shakespeare — notorious and murderous.¹⁹

Simultaneously with the forthright counsel of the naïve Machiavelli, there was promulgated Castiglione's more subtle *disinvoltura*, a concept for which he consciously coined that particular word. I have spoken of this at length elsewhere, but let me just add two points. The art of concealing one's art is lost in time; it is, we all know, part of the repertoire of all poets and artists, and, on a more frivolous level, it can, depending on fashion, add grace and elegance to an individual's dress or hair-do (and Castiglione initially takes his cue from such trivia). Most of the evidence we have shows that Castiglione's *disinvoltura* was viewed on a superficial level and that the *Book of the Courtier* was seen as fitting that frivolous, often fashionable, pattern. Yet Castiglione does point out that by exhibiting only casually (*con disinvoltura*) what may or may not in truth be great skills, then one can create the impression in others that there may remain much hidden potential. *Disinvoltura* becomes a game of bluff, and it is obvious that it is much prized in diplomacy. And if, by definition its practitioners do not greatly talk of it during their lifetimes, their posthumously published writings give that advice without blushing or without putting the writer at risk. In private, of course, thoughts might, on rare occasions, be disclosed, and such, in this context, are the celebrated marginal glosses of Gabriel Harvey, himself a thwarted diplomat-courtier. In particular his personal copies of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* and the *Witticisms* of Lodovico Domenichi show him deliberately glossing the aspects of dissimulation which could be of practical use

¹⁹ See *I Henry VI*, V. v (notorious); *III Henry VI*, III. ii (murderous); and cf. *Merry Wives*, III. i, 'Am I politic? am I subtle? am I a Machiavel?'

for him, deliberately, for instance, leaving gaps alongside important animadversions of Castiglione's, holding back from commenting until he meets the concept of *disinvoltura*, 'insouciance', which the translator, Hoby, and he gloss as 'recklessness'.²⁰ Harvey notes, for instance, that it is in a man's interests to accomplish all things as well as possible, but simultaneously give an impression of 'negligent diligence', so that witnesses to his actions 'may think he might do much better if he would'. Harvey was evidently convinced that better results could be achieved by concealing the effort necessary to accomplish one's purpose:

To do his feates with a slight: as though they were rather naturally in him, then learned with studye; and use a recklessness to cover art; without minding greatly what he hath in hand to a man's seeminge. 'Hoc age sed tamquam aliud agens'.²¹

Harvey's glosses are dated 1580 and he may have been reflecting wryly on his own failure at self-advancement because of the satirical verses which in 1579 gave offence at court and ruined his chances there for the immediate future. Indeed his two attempts at becoming head of house at Pembroke Hall were also thwarted, and he failed signally to obtain a post in Elizabeth's Civil Service. Apart from his subtle marginal comments on insouciance, he seems to have been an injudicious and choleric individual inevitably destined to withdraw, disappointed, from Cambridge and from history, unable, certainly, to put the theory into practice. Roger Ascham, noted for his adaptations of Italian educational theories, was a similar disappointed aspirant, in his particular case held back by insularity, prejudice, and a paradoxical antipathy to Italy, brought about largely by his observation, among other depravities, of the kind of dissimulation which he witnessed during a nine-day stay in Venice (his only experience of being in Italy). James Bennet's obituary of the dour Yorkshireman, in the biography which precedes

²⁰ Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Marginalia and Library* (Oxford, 1971), examines in greater detail the glosses to which I refer. I am grateful to the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, for granting me the facilities to read Harvey's copy of Lodovico Domenichi, *Facette, motti e burle di diversi Signori e persone private* (Venice, 1571). J. L. Lievsay, *Stefano Guazzo and the English Renaissance* (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 94–5 has useful remarks on Harvey's use of Guazzo and Domenichi.

²¹ The gloss is at p. Yviii of *The Courtier of B. Castiglione*, translated by Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), in the copy conserved in the Newberry Library of Chicago. I am grateful to the Newberry Library for the generous Fellowship which enabled me to study this and other valuable volumes in their collection of courtesy manuals.

his edition of the *English Works*, reflects some of Ascham's negative characteristics:

Roger Ascham died in the fifty-third year of his age, at a time when, according to the general course of life, much might yet have been expected from him, and when he might have hoped for much from others; but his abilities and his wants were at an end together; and who can determine whether he was cut off from advantages, or rescued from calamities? He appears not to have been much qualified for the improvement of his fortune.²²

That last sentence is a telling indictment of Ascham's failure to help himself.

In 1581, the year following Harvey's annotations, Oxford was just welcoming one of its most renowned Italian exiles, Alberico Gentili, forced to flee from Italy for his free-thinking ideas. He taught mathematics and law before being elected to the Regius Chair of Civil Law in 1587. In Italy he has now become known as the creator of International Law.²³ This remarkable man had the sharpest of minds, a prodigious memory and, I suspect, a wonderful filing system; he wrote prodigiously. Two works of his were particularly popular: a treatise *On Embassies (De legationibus)* published in 1585, which probably helped to earn him the Chair, and in 1597 his *Abuses of lying (De abusu mendacii)* which was published in 1599 simultaneously with another book having similar preoccupations, *On actors and playgoers (De actoribus et spectatoribus)*.²⁴

All these books are in a way relevant to my theme but I have time merely to remark upon their liberal attitudes. Thus Gentili's main tenet in the book on lying is that 'The welfare of the people is the supreme law' (*Salus populi suprema lex est*). Although he hedges, by remarking on many variant judgements, his conclusion is that 'lying is permissible

²² *The English Works of Roger Ascham, preceptor to Queen Elizabeth*, ed. James Bennett (London, 1761), p. xv; for Ascham's abhorrence of Italian ways, see esp. pp. 240, 246, 252, 253, 257, 258; and cf. *ibid.* his diplomatic *Report (. . .) of the Affairs and State of Germany and the Emperor Charles*, pp. 39 and 46.

²³ See, for instance, Angelo Valdarnini, *Alberico Gentili, fondatore del diritto internazionale* (Florence, 1875), Ennio Agabiti, *Alberico Gentile, fondatore della scienza del diritto internazionale* (Fermo, 1908), and, more recently, G. H. J. Van Der Molen, *Alberigo Gentili and the Development of International Law* (Amsterdam, 1937) (2nd revised ed. 1968); for an enthusiastic appraisal of Alberico, see T. E. Holland, *An Inaugural Lecture on Albericus Gentilis* (London 1874).

²⁴ *De legationibus, libri tres* (London, 1585); *De abusu mendacii* (Hanover, 1599); *De actoribus et spectatoribus* (Hanover, 1589). The first of these treatises is available in an English translation by G. J. Laing (New York, 1924).

when it helps someone, harms no one and conceals no crime'.²⁵ The earlier work, *On Embassies*, a subtle blend of Machiavellian and Castiglionesque views, had been dedicated to his friend and patron, Sir Philip Sidney, whom he eulogised at the end of the book as his ideal Ambassador. The volume indeed seems to have been generated after a debate at Oxford in 1584 which involved Philip Sidney and the Earl of Leicester. It discusses such items as the immunity of diplomats, the effects upon that immunity of the diplomats' possible perfidy, diplomatic freedom of speech and action, particular qualities diplomats require, their relationship with their prince, and many other aspects. One of the longest chapters is on 'moral philosophy'. Here, astonishingly and for the first time in Italian critical history that I know, Gentili includes a long eulogy of Machiavelli: 'Nec vero in negotio isto verebor omnium praestantissimum dicere et ad imitandum proponere Machiavellum'. Gentili refuses to accept him as wicked (*scaeleratissimum*), praises his singular prudence, and has no fear concerning his so-called impiety or dishonesty, if they exist, indeed (*si qua est*).²⁶

Machiavelli, according to Gentili's reading, had been calumniated; he was worthy of our utmost compassion; he was the encomiast of democracy, the most bitter enemy of tyrants, the great defender of republican freedom. Gentili's extraordinary sympathy continues for a further two pages. He evidently recognised in Machiavelli a fellow spirit, ill-used by his Catholic motherland. But, you may wonder, what about Machiavelli's *Prince*? Here again, Machiavelli's intention was not to favour princes, nor to teach tyranny but to lay bare their secrets and reveal them in all their nakedness to the wretched populace:

Itaque tyranno non favet; sui propositi non est tyrannum instruere sed arcanis suis palam factis ipsum miseris populis nudum et conspicuum exhibere.²⁷

Gentili goes along some of the way with Garrett Mattingly. The *Prince* becomes in his view a cunningly disguised treatise aimed at educating the people, not the prince, 'ut sub specie principalis eruditionis populos erudiret'. Gentili's insistent repetition of the beneficial aspects of Machiavelli's intentions is unusual in that or any other treatment of the Florentine Secretary. And Gentili's views were being absorbed and debated by some of England's most eminent courtiers and diplomats.

²⁵ *De abusu mendacii*, p. 131.

²⁶ *De legationibus*, p. 109.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 110.

The clever, charismatic Professor of Law had achieved his position thanks also to some very important personal contacts close to Queen Elizabeth, and she was to employ him in commissions concerned with foreign relations. This was the man, who as he approached the height of his powers in Oxford, took on the brilliant Henry Wotton, first as pupil, and then bosom friend, imparting to him all the knowledge he could of mathematics and law. Izaak Walton commented with approval on Henry's progress, remarking:

There was in Sir Henry such a propensity and connaturalness to the Italian language, and those studies whereof Gentilis was a great master, that this friendship between them did daily increase and proved daily advantageous to Sir Henry.²⁸

Years later Wotton wrote to the Doge of his 'almost natural inclination for the Italian nation, loved and esteemed by me (without prejudice to other nations) with particular affection.'²⁹ His affection probably began at Oxford; it is further manifested in his writing and producing, whilst a student at The Queen's College a play entitled *Tancred*, based upon the Italian tradition made famous by Tasso. It would have been natural, I imagine, for Gentili to communicate to Wotton his admiration for Machiavelli and, given his critical attitude, to convey Machiavelli's awareness of the treacherous aspects of Renaissance politics.

After taking his MA in 1588, the unemployed Wotton began to prepare himself in the most pleasurable and profitable way to meet Fortune's storms and seize her opportunities. He spent the next seven years (1588–1595) on the Continent, three in Germany, one in Geneva and three or more in Italy. (He was, by the way, given an allowance of one hundred marks a year by his family.) It was dangerous, he knew, for an English Protestant to visit areas of Italy dominated by the Spanish, notably Milan and Naples, and Rome was full of Catholic exiles plotting against Elizabeth. Wotton, with his theatrical flair, a big hat with a blue feather, and three years of learning German to his credit, posed as a German Catholic, and was able to penetrate areas of religious controversy undreamt of by other spies; that, in effect, is what he had become — a freelance spy. He relayed various information

²⁸ Walton, p. 19.

²⁹ Quoted by L.P.S., vol. I, p. 258, from a document in the Archivio di stato in Venice, *Esposizioni Principi* (June 27, 1616), where Wotton shows his excellent knowledge of Italian: 'Una inclinatione quasi naturale alla natione Italiana, amata et existimata da me, senza pregiudicio delle altre, con affetto particolare, ch'io le presi fin dalla prima volta che passai le Alpi'.

concerning anti-Elizabethan plots to England via Lord Zouche, to whom he writes in May 1592:

No Englishman, containing himself within his allegiance to her Majesty, hath seen more concerning the points of Rome than I have done; which I speak absolutely and without exception.³⁰

By October 1592, after a summer spent in Florence with Baccio Buoni, 'a wise but wicked fallen courtier', Wotton was paying an exorbitant rent to stay in Siena at the house of a certain Scipione Alberti. Scipione was a survivor, perhaps the only survivor, of the 'famiglia' of Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Palliano and nephew of Pope Paul IV. The Carafa, including Giovanni's brother Cardinal Carlo Carafa, were expelled from Rome for murder and extortion, and finally put to death in 1561 on the orders of Pope Pius IV. Scipione Alberti had somehow eluded capture, though as Senior Steward of the household he might have been slaughtered with his ducal master. Alberti's escape had a profound effect on Wotton's mind. He recalled the episode in detail almost fifty years after his sojourn in Siena, in a letter to the young and relatively unknown John Milton, who had consulted Wotton over his own visit to Italy in 1638. A specific piece of advice offered by Scipione Alberti surfaces here and elsewhere in Wotton's letters, where Sir Henry writes:

At my departure toward Rome (which had been the centre of his experience) I had won confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself securely there, without offence of others or of mine own conscience. 'Signor Arrigo mio' (says he), 'i pensieri stretti e il viso sciolto' will go safely over the whole world'. Of which Delphian oracle (for so I have found it) your judgement doth need no commentary.³¹

The advice 'Keep your countenance open and your thoughts locked away', and Milton's subsequent experience, seem to have had a deep enough impression on the young poet's mind for him to preserve Wotton's letter for the rest of his life.

³⁰ L.P.S., vol. I, p. 274.

³¹ Ibid. vol. II, p.382; earlier (1636) Wotton had given similar advice to Michael Braithwaite, about to set off to Paris as tutor in the Embassy there, cf., vol. II, p. 364. Wotton must have already acquired a certain fame in Siena (and in Italy) if in 1598 the Siennese philologist, Orazio Lombardelli, can dedicate to him his grammar, *I fonti toscani*, the frontispiece of which reads: 'Per Signore Arrigo Vuottoni Inglese'; see G. H. McWilliam, 'Lingua toscana in bocca senese: Orazio Lombardelli's *Della pronunzia toscana*', in *The Cultural Heritage of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in honour of T. G. Griffith*, ed. C. E. J. Griffiths and R. Hastings (Lampeter, 1993).

Wotton's careful preparation began to pay off when Robert Earl of Essex, then in great favour with Queen Elizabeth, invited him to be one of his Secretaries. But, as we all know, fortune turned her face against Essex after the débâcle of 1599 in Ireland. Wotton was not one of the group of courtiers specifically viewed askance by the Queen, but, as Walton says, 'he thought prevention by absence out of England, a better security than to stay in it, and plead his innocency in a *Prison*'.³² Simultaneously Wotton's friend Francis Bacon, in a similar dilemma having counselled Essex against any foolhardy action, saved his own neck by joining the opposition and appearing for the prosecution. Izaak Walton's beautiful description of Wotton's escape captures well the latter's wisdom and guile:

Therefore did he, so soon as the Earl was apprehended, very quickly and as privately glide through Kent to Dover, without so much as looking towards his native and beloved Bocton; and was, by the help of favourable winds, and liberal payment, within sixteen hours after his departure from *London*, set upon the *French* shore; where he heard shortly after that the Earl was arraigned, condemned and beheaded; that his friend Mr Cuffe was hang'd and divers other persons of eminent quality executed.³³

It was Wotton's lesson from Scipione Alberti's experience and the exorbitant rent had proved a worthwhile investment.

Wotton's preparations to meet his new adversities in exile were exemplary. He returned to Italy and used his connections there to meet influential individuals including an old friend, Belisario Vinta, the Venetian Secretary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando de' Medici. He also returned to Rome, now all the time observed by hostile spies of several nationalities (who had nicknamed him *Il volpone*). In 1601 he was back in Florence where Ferdinando had intercepted what appeared to be conspiratorial plans to assassinate James VI, the prime candidate for the English throne on the death of Elizabeth, and, incidentally, related by marriage to the Medici. Cavalier Vinta suggested Wotton's name to the Grand Duke as a possible envoy to the Scottish King. Disguised as an Italian, Ottavio Baldi, and travelling secretly via Denmark, to avoid Elizabeth's police, Wotton met King James in Dunfermline on 9 September, 1601. He introduced himself in Italian and delivered his secret message, along with the antidotes to poisons sent by the Grand Duke, a world authority on such matters. He stayed

³² Walton, p. 22.

³³ *Ibid.*

three months in Scotland and returned whence he had come, still disguised as an Italian, his theatrical flair standing him in good stead. But the danger would soon be over for him: Elizabeth died in 1603 and James succeeded her as James I. Lord Wotton, Henry's step-brother, happened to be Comptroller of the Royal Household, and the newly installed James enquired from him about Henry's present position. It was an easy matter then for Wotton to be brought back to meet the King, 'who took him in his arms, and bade him welcome by the name of Ottavio Baldi, saying he was the most honest, and therefore the best dissembler that ever he met with'. A knighthood and the Ambassadorship to Venice followed.³⁴

Wotton's life and career illustrate well the benefits of adhering to the general maxims and advice offered by Machiavelli and Castiglione. These he refined with experience and wisdom of his own. For instance, Izaak Walton tells of a friend of Wotton's who visited him at Eton to ask for advice prior to taking up an Ambassadorship:

To whom he smilingly gave this for an infallible aphorism: that to be in safety himself, and serviceable to his country, he should alwayes and on all occasions speak the truth (it seems a State Paradox) for, sayes Sir Henry Wotton, you shall never be believed; and by this means, your truth will secure your self, if you shall ever be called to any account; and 'twill also put your adversaries (who will still hunt counter) to loss in all their acquisitions and undertakings.³⁵

Italian proverbs and aphorisms pepper Sir Henry's correspondence and commonplace book, and his enormous success as the major British representative in Italy undoubtedly owed much to his ability to assimilate Italian ways. As a postscript to his life and career, it may be worth mentioning that in his will he left, to only 'so entire an honest man' as Nicholas Pey, 'a cabinet of instruments and engines of all kinds of uses'. A footnote adds that in the lower box 'were Italian locks, pick-locks, screws to force open doors; and things of worth and rarity, that he had gathered in his foreign travel'.³⁶

³⁴ Wotton gives a modest account of part of these adventures in his 'A Character of Ferdinando de' Medici', in *Reliquiae Wottonianae* (London, 1651), pp. 359–65. There the editor gives 'Vieta' as the name of the Grand Duke's Secretary. For other details see Walton, p. 28. A propos of Wotton's pseudonym, Baldi, it is a curious coincidence that in Wotton's final year as Ambassador, a certain Camillo Baldi published a treatise on lying and diplomacy, *Delle mentite et offese di parole, come possino accomodarsi. Discorso* (Bologna, 1623).

³⁵ Walton, p. 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 72.

One of Wotton's more amusing letters home described an alleged Venetian gunpowder plot. This had been revealed to the Senate by an indigent astrologer, Benedetto Altavilla, who had run, distressed and out of breath, to recount to the authorities a vision of the spheres that he had just received, which disclosed to him, he said, the location of explosive devices stacked ready to blow up the Gran Concilio. That breathless revelation was meant to obtain for the loyal citizen a reward for his oneiromantic powers. Instead the Serenissima's torturers were put to work, suspecting that Altavilla had himself placed the gunpowder in order to gain credit for revealing it; he survived the torture, still protesting his innocence.³⁷ Sir Henry noted that the threat of being hanged on the morrow if he had confessed under torture lent a certain endurance to his frame. Wotton was obviously alive to the antics of local confidence tricksters. At this level you may think they had little to do with diplomatic negotiations, but let me mention Celio Malespini, a Venetian adventurer who was active in Venice during the early part of Wotton's service there, though I have no evidence that the two met. Celio was not his real name; he was baptised Orazio, and his youth was spent as a mercenary fighting for the Spanish forces in Flanders. He then turned to fraud, confidence-trickery, and espionage. By 1579 he was reduced to petty forgery in Florence where, in June of that year, he was condemned to the amputation of his right hand. Two months later he petitioned the Doge and Senate in Venice to take him back to serve his native city. That petition, which was published only in 1894, is a curious document,³⁸ and for my present purposes useful, because it indicates the potential political, diplomatic, and military relevance of this fraudulent kind of dissembling. In the petition Malespini, who describes himself as a former professor of war, praises the efficacy of forgery, boasts that he can forge any handwriting in any language, and counterfeit any seal. He then proceeds to list thirteen good reasons why forgery can advantage a state. In particular, dissension might be spread among opposing leagues of adversaries by allowing to fall into their hands letters which implied their treachery one to the other. Marriages between great princes and other high-born personages might be disturbed and thus give considerable aid to their opponents. Peace treaties could be turned in one's favour, attacks on

³⁷ L.P.S., vol. I, p. 364.

³⁸ G. E. Saltini, 'Di Celio Malespini ultimo novelliere italiano in prosa del secolo XVI', *Archivio storico italiano*, XIII (1894), pp. 35–80, pp. 71–4, reproduce the petition.

a fortress might be held up or made to proceed at an inopportune moment. One of the more far-fetched, I believe, of Malespini's suggestions was that the election of a Pope might be influenced by attracting votes to one's own candidate. Malespini's petition failed to convince the Senate to give him a job; he was turned down with a majority of three-quarters of the votes cast. The same Senate resolution, however, allowed him to return to Venice to live peacefully until his death thirty years later. It would have been most undiplomatic of Venice officially to give an appointment of this kind to a convicted swindler, though, no doubt, they could bear him in mind as an unofficial adviser. In the meantime Celio made a comfortable living by pirating books. His greatest coup was to publish Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* in 1580, thirteen years before the author had published it himself.

The period surrounding Wotton's years in Italy pullulates with manuals. Some of the most subtle, and most unscrupulous examples of dissimulation were to be found in the writings of Italian clerics (and here it might be worth recalling the devious Cardinal Richelieu and his Italian successor, Giulio Mazarini). Simmering beneath the surface of repressed Catholic conformity was an extraordinary range of views, some of which have been kept secret for centuries. Torquato Accetto noted in 1641 that the dissimulation of the greatest dissemblers would always, by definition, remain unknown, and they would always be anonymous. One such I believe to be Abbot Niccolò Strozzi, a Canon of Florence Cathedral, whose true identity had been lost until recently.³⁹ He was a friendly correspondent with Mazarin and the representative in Tuscany of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. I came across his manuscripts in Florence's Archivio di Stato, when looking for evidence to substantiate the view that Castiglione's *Courtier* had a more practical application than had been previously thought.⁴⁰ Strozzi's *Advice necessary for Gentlemen* is now in the public domain and I will limit myself to a couple of examples of his method, beginning with an aside where he warns his reader to avoid speaking against religious orders, particularly, he adds, the Jesuits, 'and while you may have little

³⁹ For Accetto, see below, nn. 48–51. Concerning Strozzi, it is significant that the only extensive essay to be written on this cleric before the publication of his *Avvertimenti* refers to him as 'ignoto'; Luigi Fassò, 'Dal carteggio di un ignoto lirico fiorentino' in *Scritti vari di erudizione e di critica in onore di Rodolfo Renier* (Turin, 1912), pp. 402–18.

⁴⁰ See Niccolò di Tommaso di Simone Strozzi, *Avvertimenti necessari per i gentiluomini*, ed. J. R. Woodhouse, in 'La cortegiana di Niccolò Strozzi', *Studi secenteschi*, XXIII (1982), pp. 141–93.

inclination to love them (though I wouldn't advise that), fear them, and say of them all the good in the world, and you cannot go wrong'.⁴¹ That was written about the time of the sanctification of Ignatius Loyola in 1622. But Strozzi was obviously a great dissimulator himself and much of his advice reflects the times in which he wrote:

Have no care to be considered clever and wise but rather simple and good natured. Use this precept artfully so that none become aware of your finesse — otherwise the device is ruined. The art of being clever is to know how to simulate the opposite of what one is.⁴²

And the wise Abbot was quick to suggest ways of using this particular precept. In the main he makes no excuses for what is, in effect, deceitful conduct, but at times he leads himself into a trap. For example, on one occasion he warns his 'pupil' against putting forward excuses for a colleague accused of some misdemeanour, because an excuse presupposes guilt. Then it occurs to him:

Ex avverso, if there is someone with whom you do not get along, and you want to accuse him while apparently trying to help him, make excuses for him. That way you will do him harm. Although, I do not advise this because it goes contrary to Christian charity.⁴³

Strozzi's advice understandably lacks any of the polish and art of works published contemporaneously. It was intended for the eyes of one person — possibly a future Medici Cardinal — and its forthright statements are undisguised by diplomatic niceties.

Strozzi is one with his fellow manualists in urging his 'pupil' to dissemble in order never to risk giving or receiving a negative response. A refusal clouds the air and the courtier-diplomat has to work hard to restore a positive atmosphere. The English manualists had a word for that atmosphere: *affability*, and, in a manual contemporary with that of Strozzi, Robert Johnson notes under this heading that amongst peers promises are better than flat denials:

⁴¹ *Avvertimenti*, p. 185, 'Se per poca inclinazione non volessi amare, benché non vi consiglio, temeteli e ditene tutto il bene del mondo che non potrete errare'.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 189, 'Non vi curate d'essere tenuto accorto e sagace, ma più presto semplice e bonario; usate così artatamente questo precetto che niuno si accorga della vostra finezza, perché sarebbe rovinata tutta la macchina. L'arte degli accorti è il saper fingere il contrario di quello che si è'.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 188, '*Ex avverso*, se volessi accusare qualcheduno poco vostro amorevole, sotto spezie di aiutarlo, scusatelo, che così li farete danno, quantunque a questo non vi consiglio perché contradice alla carità cristiana'.

This rule, although it cannot stand with the strict precepts and square of honesty, yet it is a special point of this qualitie (which I may call with Cicero *Artificium benevolentiae colligendae*) which is eyther a vertue or cannot stand without vertue.⁴⁴

Never say no, implied Johnson. It recalls the still current example of diplomatic language, and with it the definition of diplomat:

If a diplomat says 'yes', he means 'Perhaps'.
 If he says 'Perhaps', he means 'No'.
 If he says 'No', he is no diplomat.

That is another platitude which would have been instantly recognisable by the clever merchants and courtiers who invented modern diplomacy at the end of the fifteenth century. It is also adapted from another story.⁴⁵

Not all manuals were destined for the upper echelons of society. In growingly civilised areas of Europe new bureaucracies administered by a changing lay-educated bourgeoisie fuelled a demand for popularising volumes on etiquette and diplomacy which, in their advice, overlapped with more austere or academic manuals.⁴⁶ As part of the bureaucracy, and in a related sphere, the rise of the professional secretary led to a host of manuals on the art of secretaryship. Prior to 1500 we might take as an archetype of the court secretary Dante's portrait of Pier delle Vigne in the wood of suicides, the secretary who locked away from the public the secrets of his Emperor, Frederick II. The highly mannered rhetoric, the contorted style if you wish, which Dante puts into Pier delle Vigne's mouth in *Inferno XIII*, is symptomatically abstruse. Secretaries invariably had legal and rhetorical training enabling them to express their patron's policies in a delphic or oracular style which partly hid the import of the message and partly the mood in which it had been penned. Dante's words echo that style in the opening remarks of the episode: 'I think that he thought that I thought . . .' (Cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credessi). The post of secretary often fell to distinguished humanist scholars; Antonio Panorm-

⁴⁴ Robert Johnson, *Essaies or rather imperfect offers* (London, 1607), here para. 10 (no page numbers). Johnson may have used Cicero's *De amicitia* (cf., 17.61) for his purposes here, a fundamental text for these manualists.

⁴⁵ The story normally defines a lady, cf., Stephen Gaselee, *The language of diplomacy* (Cambridge, 1939), p. 7.

⁴⁶ There is a brief survey of these manuals in my 'Il trattato di cortesia in Italia: tra idealismo e realtà', in *I trattati di saper vivere in Italia*, ed. Alain Montandon (Clermont Ferrand, 1992), pp. 213–24.

ita, Giovanni Pontano, and³ Lorenzo Valla were but three of those who in turn adorned just one court, the Aragonese, in fifteenth-century Naples. Such gifted amateurs were constantly looking for more profitable or, at least, less uncomfortable postings where their talents made them desirable courtly acquisitions. Nevertheless their positions were precarious, and Pontano is not alone in rejoicing when he is finally allowed to retire from court duties.

Cosimo de' Medici, founding his bright new state in Tuscany, needed a more permanent bureaucracy, and established professional secretaries to oversee a growing administration and secret service for his expanding territories after 1537. Such professional secretaries were not to be confused with the high ministerial office associated with English Secretaries of State established in 1599. Giovanni Della Casa was in no doubt that the Italian court secretary had only a subordinate role,⁴⁷ unable to act on his own initiative, concerned only with reproducing, for good or ill, the instructions of his master. The manuals for secretaries published in the last half of the sixteenth century (and there were a score of such documents) reflect that subordinate role, and, in particular, a training in rhetoric which served to express policies in diplomatic and persuasive language.⁴⁸ The genre spread into the early seventeenth century. One of those secretaries was Torquato Accetto, who for many years served at the small Carafa court in a troupe de province at Andria. There he seems at least to have had the leisure to spend three years paring down his treatise *On Honourable Dissimulation*. Indeed his preface tells us that if he had delayed publication longer his emendations would have destroyed it completely. As it is, it was boiled down to fifty-seven very readable pages and was published in Naples in 1641.⁴⁹

Accetto's volume is different from earlier manuals in three main respects: it lacks the usual dedication to a noble patron, it appears outspokenly to eulogise dissimulation (in a way which once gave it the reputation of a Jesuitical handbook), but more importantly, far from

⁴⁷ Giovanni Della Casa, *De officiis inter potentiores et tenuiores amicos*, in *Prose*, ed. A. Di Benedetto (Turin, 1970), p. 165. An account of three such secretaries is given in Lina Bolzoni, 'Il segretario neoplatonico', in *La Corte e il 'Cortegiano'*, ed. Adriano Prosperi (Rome, 1980), vol. II, pp. 133–69.

⁴⁸ For an excellent and concise account of classical examples of such training and relevant manuals, see Salvatore S. Nigro's *Introduzione* to his edition of Torquato Accetto, *Della dissimulazione onesta* (Genoa, 1983).

⁴⁹ Accetto describes the evolution of his treatise in these terms, cf., *Della dissimulazione onesta*, p. 88.

being a handbook of unscrupulous advice, it becomes a consolatory essay for the down-trodden intellectual in unworthy and corrupt times. To be able to affect indifference, or even affability, in adverse circumstances is allied in Accetto with the stoical attitudes always present in earlier manuals, so as to produce a tolerable *modus vivendi*. And as a source of advice on diplomatic tolerance, the little tract formed an official part of Italian diplomatic baggage in most recent times. Written by a powerless individual, Accetto's advice became a social comment on his corrupt and unworthy times when hypocrisy, adulation and dissembling were the norm. Yet at the same time it used the most common of all diplomatic devices, dissimulation, as its greatest virtue. Without the affability which dissembling produces, then, life becomes too bitter, too antagonistic. Accetto gives away the game in his conclusion when he remarks:

When those undeserving to eat have the power to give food to the many, when the ignoramus is reputed a genius by people who know less than he, when the unworthy rejoice in honours, when the vile are considered noble, how can one survive unless dissimulation makes the senses adapt to such harsh reality?⁵⁰

That is, the book serves as a eulogy of Accetto's own stoical ability to tolerate his unfortunate circumstances.

Accetto uses *dissimulazione* in most abstruse and creative ways. The beauty of a rose, for instance, which leaves with us such an enduring idea of colour and beauty is, according to his theory, the effect of dissimulation, since all beauty is fragile and transient and our senses are deceived, so to speak, by the simple surface of vermilion which persuades our eyes of its immortal colour. Mortal beauty is simply a cadaver dissimulated by the bloom of youth. The opening of his book stresses the need to bear the truth in mind. In an ideal world, indeed in the after-life, truth will be golden and shining. In our world all that glisters is not gold, but we need not regret that, since the beautiful surface often provides its own intrinsic consolation.

As the volume proceeds it becomes obvious that Accetto has far more complex views of what dissimulation may mean, with its undertones of prudence, stoical acceptance and self-protection. But one piece

⁵⁰ *Della dissimulazione onesta*, p. 98, 'Quando un che dovrebbe perire di fame ha fortuna di poter dar il cibo a molti, quando un ignorante è riputato dotto da chi sa meno di lui, quando un indegno ha qualche dignità e quando un vile si tiene per nobile, come si potrebbe vivere se tu non accomodassi i sensi a così duri oggetti?'

of advice particularly relevant to the diplomat is arrived at in Chapter 10 where he discusses the benefits which may derive from dissembling. Here Accetto draws parallels between these examples of nature's fragile beauty and the beautiful effect which comes from polite behaviour achieved through studied diligence. He concludes the chapter with a quotation from Della Casa's *Galateo*, the cardinal behaviour manual of the previous century:

And when one reads what Monsignor Della Casa wrote of it, it becomes evident that this most noble doctrine teaches us to limit our excessive desires, which result in troublesome actions, by closing our eyes, for instance, to the faults of others so that our associations may be in good taste.⁵¹

It is not possible to believe that there were epochs when dissembling was not second nature to the man of ambition — in court and diplomatic circles as elsewhere. In 1592, the year that Wotton was acquiring some of his most useful advice and experience, Haly Heron's *Kays of Counsel* emphasised the contemporary problems more feelingly than most:

The times are changed and with the times the manners of men are altered, their hearts are hardened with untruth, and their smooth tongues are filled with secret phrases of dissembling flattery. Where is that man to be found whose words and deeds are indifferent? Where does he live whose friendship is faithful? Nay rather who lives that doth not learn to be disloyal?⁵²

Those sentiments motivated hundreds of advice manuals which, for political advantage, counselled dissembling, adulation, flattery and the like; Heron's ideas were familiar to any man of sense. Sir Henry Wotton was only too well aware of the dangers and fears expressed, but Wotton's career marks for me a turning point from that rather grim awareness to a more sophisticated approach to diplomatic, and civilised, relationships.

It is the merit of Torquato Accetto's *Honourable Dissimulation* that it helps codify the changed situation. Accetto may have had personal motives, self-pity for one, in writing his book, just as behind Machiavelli's *Prince* it is possible to see a smouldering resentment. But, whatever the motives, Accetto's *Honourable Dissimulation* did for the diplomat

⁵¹ *Della dissimulazione onesta*, p. 55, 'E leggendosi quanto ne scrisse monsignor della Casa, si vede che tutta quella nobilissima dottrina insegna cosí di restringer i soverchi desiderii, che son cagion di atti noiosi, come il mostrar di non veder gli errori altrui acciò che la conversazione riesca di buon gusto'.

⁵² Haly Heron, *Kays of Counsel* (London, 1592), p. 21.

what Machiavelli's *Prince* had done for the politician. Like Machiavelli, Accetto's work is full of commonplaces, but unlike Machiavelli, anachronistically looking back to the despotic past for examples for the present, Accetto takes up Castiglione's standard and looks forward to future epochs of diplomacy and civilised negotiation. The world still has a long way to go, but then it took many thousands of years before we reached Torquato Accetto's *Honourable Dissimulation*.

Note. I thank the Principal and authorities of the University of Glasgow for their kind hospitality, and for allowing the use of the beautiful Boyd-Orr theatre for this lecture.