

British and American Diplomatic Memoirs as Factual Narratives: A Resource for the Linguistic and Cultural Analysis of the Specialised Domain of Diplomacy.

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Non-Fictional Narrative

British and American Diplomatic Memoirs as Factual Narratives: A Resource for the Linguistic and Cultural Analysis of the Specialised Domain of

Diplomacy

Les mémoires de diplomates américains et britanniques comme récits factuels : une ressource pour analyser la langue-culture spécialisée du domaine de la diplomatie

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Cet article propose une analyse préliminaire des mémoires de diplomates dans le cadre d'une recherche sur la langue-culture spécialisée du domaine professionnel de la diplomatie. Nous nous appuyons sur un corpus de 28 mémoires de diplomates britanniques et américains publiés depuis 2000 afin de définir un « prototype générique » pour ce type de texte. Nous examinons ensuite le « substrat professionnel » des mémoires diplomatiques afin d'étudier comment les pratiques, les connaissances et les spécificités langagières du domaine diplomatique sont décrites. Enfin, nous explorons les convergences possibles entre ces récits de vie professionnelle et la « culture diplomatique ».

This paper puts forward a preliminary analysis of the diplomatic memoir as a genre, based on research on the specialised language, discourse and culture of the professional domain of diplomacy. We draw on a corpus of 28 British and American diplomatic memoirs published since 2000 in order to define a “generic prototype” for this type of text. We then examine the “professional substratum” of the diplomatic memoir and how diplomatic practice, knowledge, and linguistic specificities are described, before exploring the possible intersections between these professional life narratives and professional “diplomatic culture”.

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Introduction

- 1 CECIL Robert (Lord Salisbury) (1905), *Essays by the Marquess of Salisbury: vol 1, biographical*, Lon (...)

1In an essay on the life of British statesman Lord Castlereagh,¹ Lord Salisbury comments on the diplomat’s “ephemeral” professional legacy, leaving “nothing which art can illustrate, or tradition retain, or history portray” (Bayne, 2010: xiv). Yet retired diplomats belie this assumption by often being prolific writers, as British diplomatic historian Steiner puts it: “Old diplomats do not die; they write their memoirs.” (1994: 167) Diplomats are indeed proficient memorialists: at our most recent count, approximately 140 British and American diplomatic memoirs and autobiographies have been published since the mid-nineteenth century.

2The diplomatic field is easily distinguishable from comparable specialist domains studied in ESP such as the legal or the medical domains, as its relationship to disciplinary knowledge is not one of exclusivity but of inclusivity: diplomats throughout their careers cultivate different areas of specialist knowledge (European affairs, trade, arms control, etc.) and possess “deep skills in

a few areas, plus wide-even-if-shallow lateral skills in other fields” (Rana, 2011: 17). Diplomatic knowledge is not only technical but also socio-linguistic, intercultural and procedural (mastery of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic mechanisms for negotiation and routine intergovernmental communication, for example). Although memoirs are not fiction *per se*, they do, to some extent, tell a story and may invite, as such, some comparison to the specialised narrative of *fiction à substrat professionnel* or FASP (Petit, 1999). However, given their composite knowledge base, professional diplomatic narratives are likely to depict specialised discursive and professional practices differently from the specialised FASP narrative which often makes use of passages where specialised terminology features heavily. Yet, in the same way as FASP mirrors the professional environment it fictionalises, the diplomatic memoir as a “factual narrative” (Genette, 1990) provides a window into the diplomatic profession, explaining professional routines, cultural norms and discursive practices. A significant difference between the diplomatic memoir and FASP, however, is that a greater number of diplomats become memorialists than other professionals do fiction writers.

- 2 Our corpus references can be found in full at the end of this paper.

3The longevity and recurrence of the diplomatic memoir suggest that it may constitute a specialised genre in its own right. In order to explore this hypothesis, we constituted a corpus of 28 British and American diplomatic memoirs published since the year 2000.² The post-World War II settlement can be seen as a turning point in diplomatic practice, with the development of multilateral diplomacy following the creation of the United Nations in 1945. Memoirs published from the year 2000 onwards are therefore more likely to retell diplomatic careers framed by this historical context, as diplomat-memorialists are often retired and narrate experiences spanning a thirty- to forty-year career. Approximately 70 British and American diplomatic memoirs have been published since the beginning of the twenty-first century. We selected 28 of them in view of a synchronic, qualitative analysis, with a relatively even chronological distribution over the period and a close-to-equal number of British and American memoirs.

4The research question we examine in this paper is to what extent the diplomatic memoir, as a possible specialised genre, reflects discursive and cultural practices inherent in the diplomatic professional domain. We first set out to determine a generic prototype for the diplomatic memoir before examining its “professional substratum” (Petit, 1999) and how it exemplifies specialised diplomatic practice, knowledge and language. Finally, we suggest some tentative connections between the professional culture of the British and American diplomatic domain and its narrative instantiations in the memoir.

[1. The generic prototype of the](#)

diplomatic memoir

1.1 A complex “polygenre”

5Unlike its sister genre the autobiography, the memoir has received little critical attention (Rak, 2004: 305) despite its ancient pedigree, first appearing in France at the end of the fifteenth century and retaining since then its status as an “almost timeless narrative model” (Jeannelle, 2008: 293). The diplomatic memoir can be considered a “micro-genre” within the broader category of political memoir which encompasses military, naval, diplomatic and bureaucratic memoirs (Egerton, 1994: XIII). Despite these neat cut-off points between the different micro-genres, the macro-genre “appropriates autobiography, biography, diary, history, political science, journalism and pamphleteering, to name only its nearest literary neighbours” (*ibid.*: XII). Thus, for Egerton, “political memoir [can] best be comprehended as a polygenre—a literary amalgam of diffuse elements” (*ibid.*: 23). Notwithstanding this apparent compositional heterogeneity, the memoir presents specific structural, thematic and stylistic regularities which may establish its credentials as a genre as we argue below.

6The diplomatic memoir corresponds to the broader definition of the macro-genre given by Jeannelle:

- 3 Loosely translated from: “Les Mémoires [...] sont le récit d’une vie dans sa condition historique : u (...)”

Memoirs are a life narrative set in its historical condition in which individuals recount their journeys, caught up in the flow of events, as both actors and witnesses, and as the bearers of stories which give meaning to the past (2008: 13).³ [Our translation]

7Unlike the autobiography, whose main theme is the development of an individual’s personal identity over time, the memoir envisages the life narrative in relation to its public and collective dimension. The memoir thus builds a factual narrative on several levels—personal/autobiographical, historical, and professional—which explains its variegated nature. The compositional challenges of ordering a multi-layered account are channelled through the recurring use of certain thematic sequences and recourse to a clear structure as we shall now see.

1.2 Thematic and structural patterning

8Drawing on the work of Maingueneau, Saber (2011: 42-44) insists on the importance in genre analysis of the notion of a “typicality scale”: a given genre presents a certain number of recurring linguistic patterns which constitute the “genre specifications” (*cahier des charges*), and remain flexible and open to

variation from one text to another:

- 4 Loosely translated from: “Les genres discursifs peuvent être considérés comme des ‘catégories proto (...)”

Discursive genres can be considered ‘prototypical-stereotypical categories [...] definable by patterns or gradients of typicality, by bundles of recurring and predominant features rather than by very strict criteria.’⁴ (Adam, 1999: 93-94 in Saber, 2011: 42) [Our translation]

9We applied the generic specifications concept to our corpus in order to determine whether certain recurring structural, linguistic or thematic features formed a generic protocol. The diplomatic memoirs in our corpus all share a similar structure: the narrative follows a chronological order, usually spanning the entire career of the diplomat, including one or two chapters on childhood and education and one on retirement. On the whole, the scope of the memoir is a career in its entirety, allowing for reflexion and appraisal of the specificities of diplomacy as a profession. This structural choice mirrors the status of the authors: 26 out of our 28 authors can be considered career diplomats (as opposed to political appointees), or members of the diplomatic service for a significant part of their careers, and none of the memorialists currently serve as diplomats.

10The diplomatic memoir also shares with the umbrella memoir genre regular thematic sequences such as thumbnail portraits of colleagues, descriptions of places and landscapes, anecdotes, and broad historical accounts (Jeannelle, 2008: 357). These thematic features are remarkably symmetrical from one diplomatic memoir to another and reflect a solid crystallisation of this group of texts into a coherent whole. As a result, each memorial narrative responds to the generic expectations of its readers, who are attracted to the memoir precisely because it promises to satisfy these requirements (*ibid.*).

11Another recurring thematic and stylistic trait of the diplomatic memoir is its intertextuality. The main thematic focus of the memoir narrative (the memorialist) is usually depicted against a broader, collective discursive background, which continually reiterates a form of socio-professional cohesion (Jeannelle, 2008). According to Quinby:

Whereas autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. (1992: 299)

12This interdiscursive background is built up through multiple references to the published, written work of politicians, diplomats, journalists, academics and literary authors (Hurd, 2004: 288; Bauman, 2014: 2762-2766; Rickerd, 2012: 50). We also find numerous references to other political and diplomatic memoirs (Grove,

2005: 282; Barrington, 2014b: 5109-5113). These sources serve as interpretive guidelines reinforcing the idea that each diplomatic memoir represents the micro-genre as a whole, putting forward a coherent version of the professional diplomatic narrative respecting the correct codes. Each memorialist provides descriptions of a diplomatic professional cultural sphere based on shared group beliefs, references, and memories.

1.3 Function

13 Nearly all the memoirs in our corpus share an explicit statement of purpose presented in the first few pages, again pointing to a certain stability of the micro-genre. The specificity of the diplomatic memoir resides in its intermediate functional space between a subjective settling of scores, engaging with the discourse and actions of others, and an objective account of past foreign policy. The authors in our corpus often position themselves as observers, merely recounting the events they witnessed throughout their careers. Despite this claim for neutral observer status, our diplomat-memorialists provide background information deemed necessary to put their professional contributions in context, subtly promoting their own roles and occasionally admitting to mistakes made or lost opportunities (Harsha, 2015: 8829-8854; Barrington, 2014a: 2457-2460). References to the sources used (diaries, papers, diplomatic correspondence, government archives, and letters) serve as a guarantor of the narrative's historical accuracy, but are frequently framed by a double disclaimer that the memoir is not an objective historical account, nor a reflection of the opinions of the diplomat's foreign ministry. A final goal that is often evoked in the memoirs of our corpus is to allow readers insider access to the inner workings of the British and American diplomatic systems. The authors achieve this objective by presenting descriptive sequences where specialised practices, procedures, and language are detailed in the form of a FASP-like "professional substratum" (Petit, 1999) accompanying the professional narrative.

2. The "professional substratum" of the diplomatic memoir

2.1 Specialised language and genres

14 A close association between professional reality and fictional narrative strategy is at the heart of Petit's (1999: § 33) definition of the "FASP" thriller. The professional domain and its actors are the driving force behind the plot: professional objects, procedures, knowledge, and practices are described in detail and become the axes around which the narrative is articulated. In doing so, FASP provides distinct insights into different specialist domains. The diplomatic

memoir, a non-fictional narrative, relies on slightly different techniques in its depiction of the professional domain. Specialist practices do not dominate the memoir to the same extent as in a FASP work of fiction, where they appear as a proliferation of details anchoring the narrative in a specific professional locale. There is, however, perhaps a greater emphasis on explaining specialist documents and lexis in the diplomatic memoir, which may be because a sizeable portion of a diplomat's knowledge is based on linguistic, discursive and genre competence.

15 Possible genres that seem specific to the diplomatic profession are frequently referred to in our corpus and are usually accompanied by explanations regarding the document's main purpose, structure, and style. The document which appears the most regularly in the memoirs is "the diplomatic telegram" (for the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office) or "diplomatic cable" (U.S. Department of State). The "lifblood of any decent diplomatic machine", the telegram is "a collective classified message, as tautly drafted as possible, sent from overseas posts to London and vice versa [...] analysing events in the host country and making recommendations for policy" (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 6, 295). Another frequently recurring potential genre in the corpus is "the diplomatic note" (Wilkowski, 2008: 230; Murray, 2006: 39), defined by Berridge and James (1999: 172) as "a strictly formal, third person, no-frills communication which is sometimes known as a note verbale [...], the customary mode of written communication between an embassy and a ministry of foreign affairs". The corpus also enables us to flesh out definitions of other diplomatic documents. Berridge and James' definition of a "demarche" as "an initiative taken by a diplomat, which may be anything from a suggestion to a threat" (*ibid.*: 60), does not suggest that a demarche can be a collective action, although references to this document in our memoirs do point that way. Thus, our corpus provides precious information on contexts of use as well as on the appraisal diplomats themselves have of the documents they produce and of the structural constraints internalised by the diplomatic community. Rickerd provides a good example of this in his memoir when describing the annual review (or report):

For decades it was a tradition—indeed a requirement—that British Ambassadors and High Commissioners write an Annual Review to the Office setting out the year's key events in their host country, summarising the state of relations with the UK and taking a guess at what might happen in the year to come (the latter section became known as the 'Whither Ruritania?' passage). (Rickerd, 2012: 41)

16 Specialised diplomatic lexis is envisaged in much the same way as diplomatic documents. Specialised terms do not pepper the diplomatic narrative in the same way as in a FASP work of fiction, where they serve the stylistic purpose of adding authenticity and anchoring the narrative in a specific setting, first and foremost because diplomatic language does not share the same amount of specialised terminology as the medical domain for example, a typical FASP setting. It would perhaps be more fitting to refer to specialised *lexis* rather than to specialised

terminology in the case of diplomacy. That being said, we find numerous explanatory sequences in the memoirs aimed at rendering diplomatic language more explicit. References to diplomatic language cover three main areas: (a) terms referring to international diplomatic convention and practice such as *casus belli*, “withdrawal of ambassadors”, “material breach”, “back-channel message”, “diplomatic status”, etc.; (b) terms referring to the diplomatic apparatus of a state or political organisation in a foreign ministry or embassy (residence, chancery, *chargé d'affaires ad interim*, political counsellor, High Commission, country director); and finally, (c) more culture-specific terms that refer to British or American diplomatic traditions or practices (“diplomatic pouch/bag”, “red box”, “familiarisation visit”, etc.). The fact that these lexical items are accompanied by explanations points to their specificity and possible status as specialised terms, as the following definition of “*agrément*” illustrates:

But, out of the blue, in the early autumn of 2002, my staff told me that the Foreign Office had officially sought what is known as *agrément* from the US State Department for David Manning to replace me as ambassador in August 2003. This is the process by which governments are asked to approve the appointment of a new ambassador. (Meyer, 2005: 273)

17A final exemplification of specialised lexis in the diplomatic domain is the frequent use of acronyms such as “CODEL”—congressional delegation (Meara, 2006: 150), “MIFT”—my immediately following telegram (Murray, 2006: 61), “DEYOU”—a telegram which can be decrypted only with the ambassador present (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 61), or “CMD”—*Chef de Mission Diplomatique* (Murray, 2006: 26).

2.2 Specialised practices and knowledge

18The memoirs in our corpus all seem to share a pedagogic objective aimed at rendering diplomatic activity transparent for the layman, possibly as a way of combatting an underlying prejudice that diplomacy is an arcane and obscure profession. They contain descriptive sequences explaining typical diplomatic practices, the mechanisms of multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, as well as diplomatic conventions and protocol that remain important to the profession. We often find job-profile type descriptions which sum up the main responsibilities and goals of a particular diplomatic posting. “Typical-day” narratives are another strategy used to shed light on a diplomat’s routine, as in this example taken from Grove’s memoir recounting his experience as American consul general in Jerusalem:

I began a typical day with an informal staff meeting in my office after reading the overnight cables from Washington and from other posts in the region. I might next meet with Palestinians and then have lunch

with a visiting American, a journalist, or Sam Lewis if he was in town. [...] Afternoons might be devoted to visiting mayors on the West Bank and observing settlements to report on new activities. At the end of the day I dictated the cables [...] that needed to go out and mused about things in general with Jock. (2005: 226)

19The multilateral negotiating process is not generally described in minute detail. One of the most salient aspects of multilateral diplomacy for our memorialists is the arduous transaction process involved in agreeing on “common language” for future commitments or agreements (Wilkowski, 2008: 316; Hurd, 2004: 216), which takes the form of “bracketing”, as Bayne explains:

We began by writing phrases on a blackboard, for the Russians to amend and endorse before they went down on paper. Next we converted these to sentences, with any disputed wording replaced by dots [...]. We constructed a complete agreement, full of dots [...] then we went back over this again, replacing the dots by agreed language where possible or by alternative allied and Russian proposals in brackets. (2010: 72)

20This reference to linguistic negotiation is extremely interesting as, in addition to underlining the collective aspect of diplomatic drafting, it illustrates that in multilateral diplomacy tensions can crystallise around certain terms, endowing them with specific meaning and performative power.

21Finally, the memoirs in our corpus contain numerous references to diplomatic traditions and protocol such as the impossibility for diplomats to accept foreign decorations which, according to Barrington (2014a: 3645-3646), goes back to “the principle enunciated by Queen Elizabeth I that ‘I will not allow my dogs to wear other people’s collars’”. It is striking that the diplomatic conventions which appear most systematically in the memoirs are those involving ritualised forms of social interaction such as the customary round of “diplomatic calls” newly arrived diplomats are expected to make on other diplomatic colleagues and important contacts (Perkins, 2006: 381), the schedule of appointments with relevant home government departments and companies the diplomat follows before travelling to post (Meyer, 2005: 52), and the farewells to diplomatic colleagues upon leaving post or retiring (Meyer, 2005: 75; Hurd, 2004: 135). The importance of maintaining valuable social relationships is more than just a protocol requirement; it is an important feature highlighted by our authors in their portrayal of diplomatic professional culture. Such depiction of diplomatic culture is more complex than a simple, descriptive characterisation because it obeys a higher imperative as part of a defence of the diplomatic profession that oscillates between overt praise and a re-positioning of the individual diplomat, constrained by a set of strictly codified professional cultural norms.

3. Connection and disconnection between professional culture and professional life narrative

3.1 Reifying diplomatic culture through the memoir

22 Intuitively, given the long history of the diplomatic profession—generally argued to have emerged with the creation and spread of permanent resident embassies in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century (Berridge, 2010)—the existence of a specific “diplomatic culture” among professional diplomats, sharing the goal of successfully and peacefully implementing their government’s foreign policy through contact with other states or political entities, is highly probable. However, diplomatic culture has been deemed a “sponge word [that] can soak up a variety of operational meanings but at some saturation point begins to leave a logical and functional mess behind” (Der Derian, 1987: 31). In international relations studies the notion of diplomatic culture is nonetheless gaining ground (Sharp, 2004: 363) and generally refers to

the accumulated communicative and representational norms, rules, and institutions devised to improve relations and avoid war between interacting and mutually recognizing political entities (Wiseman, 2005: 409).

23 Diplomatic culture is thus understood by international relations scholars at a global level, shaped by the “diplomatic corps” of all diplomats worldwide and potentially resonating or conflicting with national cultures.

24 Writing a diplomatic memoir can be seen as a professional ritual for diplomats who have reached the end of their careers. Additionally, the memoir constitutes an ethnographic resource for better understanding the intersection or separation between national British and American cultures and the professional organisational cultures of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and of the American State Department. The stability of the diplomatic memoir can also be seen in the homogenous portrayal of the diplomatic profession, a laudatory description of an often criticised occupation.

3.2 A collective *apologia* of a “people-intensive” profession (Ferch, 2013: 38)

25 Auwers and Biltekin (2012: 182), in a study of twentieth century Belgian and Swedish diplomatic memoirs, show that democratisation processes throughout

the period led diplomats to write memoirs as a way of upholding their profession. This defensive stance, which seems to be a staple in diplomatic memoirs, draws on the rhetorical strategies of the *apologia* genre, defined as “a public speech of self-defense” (Ware & Linkugel, 1973: 274) in response to a perceived attack. One of the most frequent devices used in our corpus is tacit rebuttal: diplomat-memorialists are careful, for example, to underline that taxpayers’ money is not frittered away on vacuous and expensive cocktail receptions and that their sometimes modest social backgrounds did not preclude them from joining the ministry of foreign affairs (Charlton, 2016: 291-295), thus providing a corrective to some of the more pervasive stereotypes about the diplomatic profession. Another strategy used in the corpus is what Ware and Linkugel (1973: 278) call “differentiation”, a “cognitively divisive strategy” which leads the audience to separate a fact or object from one context and place it in another, different context thus altering its meaning. One example is the utility of diplomatic protocol, which should be seen not in the context of ancient tradition but in that of cross-cultural communication. Repeatedly, we are told that what could be mistaken for needless flummery or outdated pomp and circumstance, such as the ceremonious presentation of diplomatic credentials to the head of state or government, a ritualistic event finely tuned to the accrediting country’s protocol, needs to be interpreted as a symbolic communicative exchange of meaning between countries or governments.

26Consequently, the symbols and rituals of the diplomatic profession are presented as meaningful and contribute to a more general argument throughout the memoirs: the diplomatic profession is relevant, necessary and mobilises specific skill-sets. The perceived coherence of diplomatic work tallies with a remarkably laudatory celebration of the profession. To cite just one example among many, Cowper-Coles describes his memoir as

a love letter to an institution—the Foreign Office [...]. For thirty-three years, I looked forward almost every working day to going into the office, or embassy, or wherever work took me. I was never bored. And I didn’t just enjoy being a diplomat. I also believed that what I did as a diplomat mattered in small but important ways. (2012: xi)

27A career in diplomacy is portrayed as being worthwhile, varied, and ultimately extremely fulfilling (Wilkowski, 2008: 163; Meara, 2006: 97; Carrick, 2012: 154-158).

28One possible reason for this widely shared career satisfaction could be the cohesive professional (and personal) networks built up by diplomats throughout their careers. Diplomacy is frequently described as relying heavily, even exclusively, on people-to-people relationships. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and State Department figure as “collegial” organisations, a “family” and a “club”, structured around specific norms and practices including the perpetuation of a collective work ethic. The memorialist’s entry to the exclusive diplomatic club is symbolised by a formal letter of appointment in the British

case and by taking an “oath of office” in the American.

29The proclaimed “family spirit” within the two organisational structures (British and American) is not just a superficial sentiment but can be linked to subtle forms of norm transmission and inculcation. Throughout the memoirs of our corpus, diplomacy is presented as something one “learns on the job” through mentoring by senior colleagues, suggesting a process of acculturation to the organisational norms, practices, and values inherent to “officemanship” (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 4). Diplomats are also mentored in order to reach the required level of linguistic and genre competence. We often read recollections of the diplomat’s first attempts at drafting a telegram (Rickerd, 2012: 11; Perkins, 2006: 192), such as this example from Barrington’s memoir:

I reported to one of the two Assistant Heads of Northern Department, Christopher McAlpine, from the contractor family. He was patient with me but had much to teach. Typically he would attack my drafts with lines, brackets and excisions so that sometimes only a few words in the middle of the page survived. (2014b: 825-855)

30Despite being a “murderously competitive” profession (Ortiz, 2005: 207-208), references to diplomatic colleagues as well as to countless “friends” encountered in diplomatic postings present a running leitmotif in the corpus. Rather than settling scores, colleagues and friends are mentioned in positive terms as unique individuals who add up to form interpersonal networks which give structure and meaning to the diplomat’s geographical rotation through different posts. This is manifest in the acknowledgments and dedication pages forming the memoir’s paratext (Genette, 1982). Diplomatic colleagues are typically described with “affection, gratitude and admiration” (Talbot, 2003: 8036-8038). The international diplomatic corps is also portrayed in a positive light as a collective which creates a collegial working atmosphere that facilitates fruitful diplomatic endeavours (Burrows, 2001: 158; Bayne, 2010: 67).

3.3 From heroes and thumbnails to professional cultural values

31The notion of the “diplomatic hero” appears to be a popular one among our diplomat-memorialists who use the term explicitly to refer to certain colleagues (Barrington, 2014b: 1711-1712). Diplomats who have made their mark on history, such as Henry Kissinger “the unrivalled philosopher of foreign policy” (Hurd, 2004: 571), Jean Monnet (Barrington, 2014a: 4232-4234), or George Kennan (Talbot, 2002: 305-307), are also revered. More than passing references, diplomatic heroes serve as a way of showcasing the qualities of the ideal diplomat through thumbnail descriptions, as illustrated by the two following prototypical examples from our corpus:

He was an excellent negotiator, being calm, patient and ingenious, and enjoyed the Prime Minister's total confidence. (Bayne, 2010: 144)

Hammarskjöld possessed qualities which [...] included a great capacity for hard work, a highly educated and sensitive mind, an interest in and commitment to the philosophical wisdom of different civilisations, and a personal dignity which required no buttressing with pomp and protocol. (Hurd, 2004: 158)

32The repeated use of these thematic sequences gives the authors an opportunity to work out the diplomatic profession's most cherished values such as professional integrity, the principle of free comment during the policy-making process, and a commitment not to criticise policy decisions once they have been taken (Burrows, 2001: 22; Perkins, 2006: 242). Other qualities featured are political independence and impartiality as professional civil servants (Meyer, 2005: 10; Burrows, 2001: 175), a distrust of ideology (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 122), patriotism and loyalty to the home nation's best interests (Grove, 2005: 256), the importance of personal progress, learning curves and growth (Bauman, 2014: 2085-2087; Rickerd, 2012: 146), and finally the mandarin ethos of public service (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 294; Shepard, 2013: 2071-2077).

33It is worth noting that the above values are generally construed in relation to the diplomat's national culture and not to a broader international diplomatic culture. Thus, their inclusion in the narrative may be partly reactive in nature and contribute to the overall *apologia* of the profession: diplomats define themselves as loyal, patriotic, and competent public servants so as to counteract pervasive stereotypes about them "going native" and defending their host country's interests to the detriment of British or American concerns. Nonetheless, diplomatic culture can be seen not only as on the defensive, but also as a culture which aspires to ideals and constructs a value-laden, normative discourse as a result. This raises the question of the degree to which the description of diplomatic culture in the memoir reveals a tension between aspirations and reality. Behind this primary tension there may lie a second, between the diplomat as an individual and as a member of the diplomatic mandarin, bound by a constraining set of professional cultural norms.

3.4 Geographical location, dislocation and symbolic positioning: a tentative form of self-assertion?

34The diplomatic profession is based on geographical mobility. The "mobility obligation" (Knott, 2015: 308-311) that diplomats accept when they enter the service means that their ministry of foreign affairs can send them anywhere in the world, thus separating the diplomatic service from the rest of the civil service. According to Neumann (2012: 169-170), the diplomat's mindset is articulated around a clear distinction between work done in the home capital (London or

Washington D.C. in this case) and tasks accomplished abroad (in an embassy or international organisation for example). The abundant descriptions of place in our corpus mirror this contrast.

35The spaces of the diplomat's home foreign ministry are depicted perhaps as a way of reifying the more abstract concept of bureaucratic hierarchy. The description of office space alludes to the overarching "building hierarchy" (Knott, 2015: 379-380) of the ministerial structure, with the lowest positions located on the ground floors, and in the case of the State Department, the most prestigious offices residing in the "aerie" (Shepard, 2013: 773-776) of the "seventh floor" (Ferch, 2012: 23). Moreover, a clear chain of command is enacted spatially every day through the process of diplomatic drafting which proceeds gradually upwards, from office to office, through modifications and corrections to an original draft provided by the diplomat's superiors.

36Structural hierarchy is less apparent in the spatial descriptions of embassy homes and offices abroad. Ambassadorial residences and grounds are often sketched in minute detail from room to room, and feature lush gardens complete with exotic animals (Hurd, 2004: 115; Barrington, 2014a: 1532-1537). These idyllic depictions contrast with the "embassy-as-a-fortress" metaphor which surfaces frequently in the corpus and portrays the diplomat as being trapped within a hostile environment:

The children were to remain safely inside our fortress compound, behind the locked gate and under the protection of our thick razor wire walls. (Bauman, 2014: 338-387)

Barbed wire barriers outside the Embassy walls made the Embassy appear like a fortress, a point of contention with the Governor of Jakarta. (Harsha, 2015: 8073-8082)

37We find numerous allusions to a professional space that is codified and structured in less apparent ways. The profession is regulated through internal documents such as the *Diplomatic Service Procedure* (Murray, 2006: 247-248), the *Diplomatic Service Formbook* (Cowper-Coles, 2012: 4) or the *Foreign Affairs Manual* (Mabbatt, 2013: 140-142). In order to gain entry to the American or British diplomatic services, candidates must undergo a rigorous "direct" or "positive" vetting process, frequently cited in the memoirs (Knott, 2015: 133-137; Meara, 2006: 88). Diplomats at post are also constrained by the potential discrepancies between the information they gather from the field relevant for policy-making and the political line being taken back in London or Washington, making it difficult for them to question their superiors. According to Perkins:

Political officers find that truthful reporting can be risky to a career when he or she reports information that disagrees with the opinion of the ambassador or Washington officials. More than one political officer

caught in that predicament has been tempted to adopt Emily Dickinson's poetic advice—"tell the truth, but tell it slant". (2006: 140-141)

38As a result, the memoir occasionally takes on a confessional role as a repository where diplomats can admit how they deviated from the norms of diplomatic behaviour and culture, as Meyer confides in his memoir:

There is a long tradition of internecine warfare between the State Department and the Defense Department. Up to a point the embassy expected it and was used to dealing with it. But, after 9/11, it was different. The issue was war and peace. This heightened and exposed the tensions within the US administration. It sharpened and deepened the fault line. It made the challenge to British diplomacy immeasurably more complicated. It forced me to operate in a way that took me to the limit of what is permissible for an ambassador. My sleeve began to touch the machinery. (2005: 221)

39Perhaps this use of the memoir as a repository reflects the tendency diplomats have to put down in writing what they feel needs to be said, thus proving the importance of written communication (and of the famous "telegram" in particular) in the diplomatic mindset. Throughout the corpus, diplomats cite the telegrams they wrote in response to a particular situation, almost as a form of emotional release. Meara provides a good example of this use of the diplomatic telegram:

After that meeting, I returned to the embassy and wrote a very emotional cable about my day on the Coco. I deliberately gave it a very low classification and marked it for wide distribution in the embassy and in Washington—I wanted to share my epiphany with my colleagues. (2006: 159)

Conclusions

- 5 Loosely translated from : "[...] il présente un statut particulier, hybride, qui l'apparente aux disc [\(...\)](#)

40In his seminal work on specialised fiction or "FASP", Petit (1999: § 68) reminds us that the specialised discourse within the FASP genre does not have exactly the same status as non-fictional specialised discourse: "It does indeed present a certain number of characteristics pertaining to specialised discourse (terminological, phraseological elements, etc.), but does not itself constitute a genre or a recognised type of specialised discourse."⁵ We would argue that the diplomatic memoir, a non-fictional, professional life narrative regularly practiced by the British and American diplomatic community, constitutes a semi-

specialised genre within the diplomatic domain. For the diplomatic memoir genre to be considered “specialised” one could argue that it needs to serve the domain’s overarching purpose, which we posit to be the realisation of a political entity’s foreign policy objectives through peaceful means. To the extent that not all diplomats write memoirs and that the memoir genre is not a routine document produced by working diplomats on a regular basis, the specialisation of the memoir genre appears rather limited.

41 Nonetheless, the genre may serve secondary purposes which contribute to the overall goal of effective diplomacy. By putting forward a robust defence of the profession, diplomat-memorialists may be strengthening the assertion of a professional sense-of-self, encouraging colleagues or future diplomats to engage in a diplomatic career. They thus preserve, albeit indirectly, their professional niche as foreign policy experts at a juncture which has seen the diplomat’s professional territory increasingly impinged on by competing foreign policy pundits and Non-Governmental Organisations. An additional argument in favour of a form of specialisation of the memoir genre resides in its archival value. The memoirs of our corpus document foreign policy decisions and the context surrounding them, as well as diplomatic linguistic and professional practices as they have evolved over the past fifty to sixty years. In so doing, they provide a repository of knowledge for future diplomats in a profession which still relies to a large extent on on-the-job training.

42 Furthermore, the diplomatic memoir exemplifies one of the functions of the memoir analysed by Hart (1979: 195): “the personalizing of history; the historicizing of the personal [...], the personal act of repossessing a public world, historical, institutional, collective”. The diplomat-memorialist portrays a professional diplomatic culture structured around shared constraints (bureaucratic hierarchies, discursive dos and don’ts), values, references, and beliefs, tapping into a shared interdiscursive background guaranteeing the profession’s coherence and testifying to the importance of the social, collective dimension of the diplomatic domain. Rather than a “personalizing of history” we have perhaps a personalisation of the profession, through a discrete affirmation of the individual’s position within the bureaucratic structure, characterised by a specific career trajectory and occasional leeway to manoeuvre in undiplomatic ways.

43 However, it is important to remember that even though the diplomatic memoir can be considered a semi-specialised genre, it is one that is also written for non-specialists: the perceptions of diplomatic culture that can be gleaned from it are those that the diplomats choose to share with us and may be framed by higher objectives (defending the profession as a whole for example). That being said, it seems safe to argue that our diplomat-memorialists are acutely aware of there being a specific diplomatic cultural space which may remain impenetrable to “outsiders”, if we are to believe Perkins:

The Foreign Service is not a culture in which when an order is given, something changes. It is an unusually closed system, difficult to penetrate by non-career officers and almost impossible to understand by people outside of the system. Even now, after serving as director general and spending a career of appointments all over the world, I find it very difficult to explain this extraordinary organization known as the Foreign Service. It is a country with its own mores, customs, and language. (2006: 441)

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1 CECIL Robert (Lord Salisbury) (1905), *Essays by the Marquess of Salisbury: vol 1*,

biographical, London: John Murray, 3-70.

[2](#) Our corpus references can be found in full at the end of this paper.

[3](#) Loosely translated from: “Les Mémoires [...] sont le récit d’une vie dans sa condition historique : un individu y témoigne de son parcours d’homme emporté dans le cours des événements, à la fois acteur et témoin, porteur d’une histoire qui donne sens au passé.”

[4](#) Loosely translated from: “Les genres discursifs peuvent être considérés comme des ‘catégories prototypiques-stéréotypiques [...] définissables par des tendances ou des gradients de typicalité, par des faisceaux de régularités et des dominantes plutôt que par des critères très stricts’.”

[5](#) Loosely translated from : “[...] il présente un statut particulier, hybride, qui l’apparente aux discours spécialisés, sans en faire pour autant un véritable discours spécialisé au sens habituel. Il comporte en effet un certain nombre de caractéristiques des discours spécialisés (terminologiques, phraséologiques, etc.), mais ne relève pas d’un genre ou d’un type reconnu de discours spécialisé.”

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