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VANGIE BRUCE'S DIPLOMATIC SALON

A mid-twentieth-century portrait

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Diplomacy has long been regarded as one of the more traditional subjects of historical scholarship, at the top of Ranke's hierarchy and perhaps the closest to his heart. What could be more important than high politics, the intricate relations among states, with consequences for millions? Even military history as such came to be seen as a subset of diplomatic, later called international, history. States were the principal actors, and more often than not states appeared at once impersonal and anthropomorphic, with capital cities serving as subjects not only for official acts but also for motivations and mentalities.

The construction 'Paris said' or 'Berlin responded' is a literary device; readers of diplomatic history know this, however susceptible many of them remain to the equation of state behaviour with an ostensibly uniform 'official mind.' Historians have long dissected the official mind to show that it included, or at least incorporated, wilfully or inadvertently, 'unofficial' networks, influences and individual actors. It is far less uniform or united in practice, bureaucratically and otherwise, than official pronouncements would lead one to believe many years later. There is, in other words, no such thing as *the* official mind; there are multiple minds, and very few can be labelled accurately as purely or exclusively official or unofficial.

There have been two principal methodologies for drawing out these distinctions and reconstructing their history: the institutional, or bureaucratic, study, which is a kind of anatomy of decision-making; and the sociographic or contextual narrative with various actors coming and going to and from the stage. Neither method is causally fool proof, which leads to a search for alternatives. They need not be too difficult or obscure to identify; the two approaches may be merged so that the principal actors – official and unofficial – are understood in the Bourdieusian sense to be both agents and objects of influence.¹ That is, they act and are acted upon, just like the institutional, political and cultural setting in which they live and work. It may be reconstructed synchronically.

This method is neither new nor original; it would have been familiar to historians of early modern diplomacy, such as Garrett Mattingly and J.H. Elliott.² Yet, many of their younger counterparts, determined to recast their field as something alternative to 'traditional' diplomatic history, have become so preoccupied with categorical distinctions, especially between state and non-state actors, that they can appear at times to overlook or distort the obvious: again, no single diplomat exists in social isolation; the description of diplomacy as what one clerk says to another is a caricature, no more, no less; and the significance of diplomatic history, like diplomacy itself, comes from the richness of relations that traverse and transcend multiple boundaries, much as the McNeills have depicted the whole of world history.³ This reminder is vital to tracing the role of gender in diplomacy and in particular to knowing the place and power of women in diplomatic settings. In the modern period, at least, it is less the case that gender relations are excluded from diplomacy *per se* than it is necessary to include them in a broader, more socially-centred diplomatic history that extends well beyond the walls of chanceries.

I

The combination of collective biography with institutional and social history is known as prosopography. Although it tends to be used mainly by ancient and early modern historians with limited source bases, it is increasingly featuring in histories of later periods, especially by scholars influenced by network analysis in the social sciences. Its utility for diplomatic history has yet to be defined because comparably few modern or contemporary prosopographies exist; nor does there exist a portable theoretical foundation for it, apart perhaps from the dated work of Ludwik Fleck in the history of science. The difficulty here is that diplomatic society is so open and expansive, yet, at the same time, so heavily reliant on non-traditional (and, in the case of female subjects, sometimes limited or even non-existent) sources. To write a prosopography of a village or a particular institution is laborious enough. To master the language of human association – including its prevailing concepts and its epistemology – in a contemporary setting, and to reconstruct it in order to draw and analyze connections within a social or professional milieu demands a degree of immersion that few scholars have. To do something similar for a profession and a society that is not only multilingual but also cosmopolitan is formidable but not, in theory, impossible. What is needed is a version of *histoire croisée* that applies especially to diplomats and that combines the analysis of geopolitics (and geoculture), institutions, social structures, communicative patterns and norms, and personalities.⁴

The challenge for a would-be prosopographer of the twentieth century has to do with the selection of evidence; with so much of it available – in official archives alone – how should one set priorities? Does any single category of evidence carry the most weight? Are private recollections more reliable than the official record or memoirs?⁵ And what to do about actors who appear in accounts to be significant but who have left little or no written record at all? These standard methodological

questions have special relevance to a form of diplomatic history that seeks to blur traditional categories.

They are complicated further by the interpenetration of the public and private realms of diplomacy, where actors 'represent' the views or policies of the state to which they belong, which has been the case since modern diplomacy was invented during the Renaissance. In this respect, diplomatic actors are in contention with the social scientist or the biographer who seeks to understand them and decode their evidence.⁶ Reconstructing their histories is also complicated by the many degrees of nuance, insinuation and sometimes deception that occur in the written record. A Rankean attempt to distil a single narrative from the mass of such evidence would be ambitious indeed. A more modest effort would be a prosopography of a particular diplomatic network at a particular moment through the eyes of its principal subjects. However, this type of study usually draws the conclusion that the subjects' historical significance – or what they describe as professional success or failure – is primarily contextual, and continuous. That is to say, it is marked less by roles at particular conjunctures than by a shaping of social boundaries and standards over time. It falls upon the masterful Rankean to parse the distribution of textual and contextual significance of such people.

One important attribute of prosopography is a liberal approach to setting and character. Just as networks include official and unofficial actors, so they blur distinctions of settings with a diplomatic vocation. In principle, everything counts, from social lives to tastes in food, sport and games to expressed thoughts, habits, appetites, health conditions and social calendars. The aim of this portrait is to reaffirm their qualified inclusion by illustrating how one woman's work contributed to the high tone and stylishness of American diplomacy at the peak of its twentieth-century influence.

II

Chief among diplomacy's settings since the eighteenth century were the salons where elite society gathered. It is nearly impossible in retrospect to apply an official, semi-official or unofficial label to them. Salons may claim to be one thing; they are, or may be, another. In the following case, there is a salon whose founder rejected the label. She acted like the diplomats who subsume personal identities into professional ones, or disabuse themselves of familiar life boundaries while refashioning numerous codes, rules and formalities in practice.

Historians generally place the peak of salon culture in eighteenth-century Paris but it thrived also at other times and places. As Glenda Sluga has written elsewhere in this volume, these settings performed a political as much as a social or literary role insofar as they were an alternative or auxiliary setting where decisions were pondered, alliances were formed and solidified, and friendships made, broken or repaired. Salons flourished on both sides of the Atlantic in the twentieth century and there, too, many were presided over by women, notably diplomatic wives.

The salon of Evangeline Bruce (1914–1995) was one of the most continuous and, according to contemporary accounts, celebrated. In London in the 1960s, 'Vangie' was named the 'Number One American hostess . . . by rank and ability'; in Washington she was 'dubbed "The Fourth Mrs. B"' after Washington's three legendary *salonnières*, Mildred Bliss, Virginia Bacon and Marie Beale. Vangie eschewed the title, however: 'Hostess – that one I really resent.' She described herself, as others would describe her, as a diplomatic professional, 'partners [with her ambassador husband] in every sense of the word.'⁷ She cast the same denial upon her effort:

I don't think any gathering in Washington includes the main ingredients of a salon. The French would say that a salon is like-minded people getting together to converse on literature, art, history and politics. The tone has to be light, humorous, witty and, the more elusive the reference, the more prized. In Washington we don't go for elusive statements. We are not particularly well-read and therefore even the deft allusions are lost.

The thinking is that salons should be run by women because women are considered able to conquer egotism better than men—they take the time to be sure that everyone shines, they are more likely to keep their own talents in the background.

Alice Longworth [daughter of Theodore Roosevelt] is the only one I know whose gatherings were a bit like that. In a salon, you can't be ponderous, egocentric. Anything other than a lucid, witty, graceful style is simply not allowed. That doesn't sound like Washington does it?

It is rare here to discuss things in conceptual or philosophical terms; it is strictly nuts and bolts. I like living here better than any place in the world, but the first thing I notice when I leave to spend some time in Europe is the conversation, the variety, the non-philistine approach.⁸

If by her own account Vangie was neither hostess nor *salonnière*, what was she? The term she preferred was the simplest: diplomat. 'I was dipped in diplomacy from birth.'⁹ The daughter, step-daughter, niece and husband of diplomats, she had lived in many countries – Hungary, Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands – before she had spent much time in the United States. Following the death of her father, the American diplomat Ned Bell, Vangie and her younger sister endured, when they were not at boarding school, the rarefied world of their English mother, Etelka Surtees, and her new husband, Sir James Dodds. Vangie emerged as a 'slim, shy Radcliffe graduate' who nevertheless sought some part in the war. She found herself sitting at an embassy party next to William 'Wild Bill' Donovan, the founder of the Office of Strategic Services, and asked him for a job. Impressed by her multilingualism, Donovan assigned her to the London station, headed by an old friend of her father's, Ambassador William Phillips, where she typed, created false papers for American operatives and translated documents into French. When Phillips was reassigned to India his place was taken by a younger and more dashing boss, David Bruce.¹⁰

David was the son of a senator descended from the Chesapeake gentry. His biographer has described him as ‘an eighteenth century Virginia remnant that got mislaid’ and ‘one who dallied a while along the primrose path, tasting the rarer sweets of life, deftly foiling the attempts of his guardian angel to hurry him to righteousness, peace and an ordered life.’ He fought in World War I, worked briefly in the foreign service and as a legislator, and on Wall Street. He and Vangie fell in love and would eventually marry, but not until David secured a divorce from his first wife, Ailsa, the daughter of Andrew Mellon. She was once said to be the richest woman in America but by this time was a mentally ill recluse. Neither David nor his reputation suffered badly from the divorce. Indeed he did well, it was said, because of a talent for avoiding risks. David ‘emerged from the water dry,’ Isaiah Berlin once concluded. ‘Everyone without exception, so far as I can tell, in every country in which his name was known, respected [David] deeply, and behaved better and thought better of themselves in his presence. Not since General Marshall, I think, was there such a consensus, public and private.’¹¹

The next war brought him back to public service, where he remained for the next three decades, moving from a position with the Red Cross to the OSS to the Marshall Plan to ambassadorships to France, Britain, West Germany and NATO, and to China as head of the American liaison office. He was the only American ever to so serve in all these capitals. Together the Bruces were a formidable duo that brought forth a stream of superlatives: ‘All Paris reveres David’ while Vangie was ‘a living legend . . . because of all sorts of nice reasons – her parties, her charm, her good looks, her metabolism and her wit’; ‘exquisite, a monument from a different time’; ‘long and willowy . . . [with] piercing eyes and a lightness that was timeless . . . grand, yet accessible’; ‘one of the most beautiful women of her generation’; the genius who had ‘a sixth sense about whom to invite . . . “Who Is and Who Will Be”’ and whose parties were ‘the epicenter of the world of the influential, the intellectual, and the wealthy.’ Rare was the reported comment of Mr Berlin, who called Vangie ‘a bloody bore.’¹²

None of the above is sufficient by itself to merit historical significance. And none of it should be taken at face value. Vangie could be contradictory. She was ‘unusually sensitive,’ recalled one longstanding acquaintance, ‘but there was a front of unusual dispassion. It cost her a great deal to maintain that front, that polish, that smooth and steady exterior.’¹³ But it paid dividends, not least to their country’s reputation in the places its elite cared most about during this period, namely Europe. The Bruces embodied a transatlantic ideal. They were at ease with, and even seemed to prefer, a European milieu, yet they were promoted as the cream of their country’s crop of diplomats, the ‘Platonic archetype of themselves, the sort of person that they at their best wanted to be.’ David could sound more modest: ‘I am inordinately proud of being an American,’ he observed, ‘but one cannot be a good American unless he is conscious of his own shortcomings. . . . Europe has much to learn from the United States. On the other hand, the United States has much, very much, to learn from Europe.’¹⁴ Such was their education and existence.

Such was also the distribution of prestige between the public and the private roles of envoy and courtesan. It was not simply that ‘entertainment was a job.’¹⁵

Rather, it was that the job and the entertainment were a composite and collective act, a role given official recognition down the ranks as the performance of diplomatic wives at this time was rated in their husbands' efficiency reports.¹⁶ '[David] Bruce had accepted a job that enshrined hospitality, even apotheosized it,' his biographer has written, but it is inconceivable he could have done that without his wife's full collaboration. The same was almost entirely true for her, as the two were 'mutually codependent . . . basically inseparable,' however much their roles functioned in parallel:

A half hour seems to be the minimum required to pay one's respects, then the visited appear to require some sixty to seventy man hours of conversation, and much epistolary exercise. Evangeline meanwhile must pursue a similar course with the wives. At the end of all this we will be considered purified.¹⁷

The historian who reconstructs the contribution of either Bruce through an examination of the record of memoranda and official minutes will give a distorted picture of this partnership, for while Vangie's voice is barely heard at all, David's cables are long and numerous. They were said to bring such enjoyment to President Kennedy, for example, that he asked to see nearly every cable as it came in, calling Bruce 'the most eloquent American statesman since Thomas Jefferson.'¹⁸ Kennedy realized not long after appointing David to London that he had wasted an opportunity. Kennedy's relationship with the British ambassador, David Ormsby-Gore, was so close that the latter was regarded by some people as practically a member of the cabinet, even the Kennedy family; and Kennedy was fond of Harold Macmillan. Ambassador Bruce therefore was 'almost superfluous' in London.¹⁹

Not quite. Diplomacy does not generally operate so exclusively. David's diary has described those days as among the most crowded of his life. 'Running [Winfield House – the ambassador's residence] was like managing a small business,' Vangie noted, and their lives were so busy that one wonders at the Bruces' capacity to endure or perhaps to resist, it. (The diary goes into great detail about everything from the vintages of Burgundies to the reputations of chefs to dinner party gossip to the ideal combination of dishes, even ingredients, and notes frequently that the two barely found time to sleep.) This was not atypical. But what is one to make of the blatant choice of emphasis? The answer goes deeper than the blurring of categories. It underscores the point made by other essays in this volume, namely Sluga's, that prestige, fashion and diplomacy are indeed so interdependent as to rise or fall, succeed or fail, according to fungible yet precise standards. Good diplomats know this instinctively. So do good dinner hostesses. It is not enough then to note Palmerston's line about dining being the 'soul of diplomacy' or to suggest that the Bruces had an especially powerful love of good food, conversation and (especially in David's case) wine.²⁰ There was more to it than that. There were the personal associations that Vangie nurtured over the course of over four decades. There was a passion for this activity as well as a duty to pull it off. And a good deal of recognition

thereby. Not only the British but also the ‘French liked David Bruce,’ recounted a later memoirist, ‘but they *loved* Evangeline’:

Her reputation among Frenchmen from all walks of life was due in no small measure to her physical beauty, her familiarity with French fashion, her knowledge of the French language, and her interest in French history . . . she contributed articles on American subjects for publication in French literary and historical journals. Paris’s foremost intellectuals, labor leaders, scientists, economists, businessmen, and policy makers came to the official embassy residence . . . for what one visitor termed ‘long pleasant evenings of perfect food and stimulating conversation, orchestrated almost entirely by Mrs. Evangeline Bruce . . .’ It was a period . . . when French governments came and went with dizzying and deceptive speed, and each time a new government was being formed an emissary would be dispatched to the American embassy to ask the Bruces whether the replacement government would be acceptable to Washington.²¹

The care and feeding of networks meant the sharing of pleasures, values, attitudes, allegiances, tastes and fashions. David’s diary evokes the trust that came from these exchanges, and goes out of its way to cast them above politics. He recounts, for example, a perfect day in Venice with friends in the summer of 1957:

I despair of doing anything serious in this atmosphere of spells and enchantment. The German grammar I cart about remains unopened. Thick pamphlets on United States foreign policy lie unread. Syria went Communist last night or this morning; the gondola traffic is unaffected. These people lead a life apart. They have seen everything, they are reconciled to everything, they repent of nothing. When the last Doge was deposed by Napoleon, he handed his symbolic cap to a servant, observing: ‘I shall not need this anymore.’²²

How much should one make of this nonchalance? In David’s case it was not so much escapist or apolitical as egocentrically superior, as if to suggest a higher, more subtle form of diplomacy much as Wilsonian idealism was once said to be a higher realism. How much did it affect the central plot inasmuch as plot resists being monopolized by official acts and sources? This almost calls for a rhetorical presupposition: who better to master the interstices of power than a *salonnière* posing as a diplomat? Or perhaps as a woman of letters. Recalling one of her role models, Madame de Staël, Vangie, noted, ‘I have a weakness for her. . . . Everything about her is so gigantic and touching and endearing. It must have been awful to have been her lover’ yet, ‘[w]hat glory for her to have the army at her disposal!’²³ Compare Nancy Mitford’s account of Vangie in her roman-à-clef, *Don’t Tell Alfred* (1960):

‘And then there is the European Army, known as C.E.D. or E.D.C., nobody can ever remember why. One of your uncle’s assignments is to persuade us to

merge our army, which is overseas, fighting, with that of the Germans which is non-existent. The merging is desired by the Americans who see everything in black and white – with a strong preference for black’ Now, if it were a question of commerce, M. l’Ambassadeur, I believe the nation of shopkeepers would sing a very different song? Suppose we wanted a European market, Excellency, what would you say to that?’ . . . Alfred said, ‘My American colleague tells me that you are going to accept the European Army, however’ . . . ‘Your American colleague has a beautiful wife whom everybody wants to please. No Frenchman can bear to see somebody so exquisite looking sad for a single moment. So wherever she goes, in Paris or the provinces, the deputies and mayors and ministers and igames say, “of course” to whatever she tells them. And she tells them, most beguilingly, that they are going to accept the European Army.’²⁴

She need not have told them, in fact. Vangie has recalled Madame de Staël’s observation that ‘a woman’s political opinions were made clear by the way she entered a room,’ yet even this was not her principal role. Neither woman was merely an auxiliary to power, not even a ‘secret weapon’ of a husband, a suitor or a government. She did not play to the stereotype of the power behind the throne, the usurper or the *grande coquette*.²⁵ Rather, she, like Staël, stood apart from the political fray, with her primary advantage residing in the ability to assemble, to ‘mix and match,’ as might:

. . . an architect in that you must design and structure a setting where deals can be made and information exchanged. To do it successfully you have to have the right props. You need the friendships, the contacts, the house, the staff, the silverware and china. To be blunt about it, you need the finances. But the point is that if you do it well, you can make a difference. In my day, if you were able to bring together interesting, powerful men, those in charge of running the government, to trade ideas and opinions in the privacy of your living room, you could find the solution to any of a number of problems.²⁶

Richard Nixon once called Georgetown society ‘a shadow conspiracy of women.’²⁷ Spies attended Georgetown parties to pick up, and probably to spread, gossip; Vangie later recalled that the ‘best pastry chef I ever employed turned out to be an FBI agent.’²⁸ This was merely symptomatic. Vangie’s salon not only provided the critical setting for some of the best and the brightest of the era to loosen their tongues. It also, perhaps more so, prescribed their language through the skilful extension of social and personal limits. It furnished not only a setting for politics but also for the cultivation, or even the manipulation, of its principal characters by forcing members of opposing parties together in close quarters with journalists, literary figures and bureaucrats, and by measuring, testing and altering the bounds of familiarity between them and those closest to them, notably their spouses. Taken as a whole, this helped to define the texture of American and European diplomacy

at mid-century by ordering its standards of communication and performance. That much is not in historical dispute. Yet it does not resolve the question of significance, or, for that matter, of sincerity. One must return again to contextual boundaries. How much of this activity could be regarded, like Vangie herself, as part of a façade? How much of it was genuine? How much did the integrity of the display, including its deft combination of the receptive and the refined, rely upon a more ruthless private world, that is to say, less an authentic public spirited effort than an unspoken suppression of the mismatched, unhappy or merely inelegant parts of her inner life? Vangie may have refused to call her salon by that name because it was meant to succeed within an ostensibly democratic political culture, and because she was determined to promote herself as someone other than a courtesan or socialite, indeed, as a true diplomatic professional in equal partnership with her husband. But this must have enacted a price. Prevailing gender identifications set the bar high to carry off this manner of latent equality. It was neither professional and public in the usual sense, nor private; yet it sought to master both realms together, and at once. To all appearances, it nearly succeeded. It set a social and political benchmark. Yet it is nearly impossible to judge based on the limited evidence available whether it was precisely the kind of success Vangie had in mind.

III

‘Is the picture too perfect?’ the British politician Roy Jenkins once asked of David Bruce. ‘Was there insufficient conflict? I raise the question with temerity, and I answer it by saying that I suspect it went on within himself. He absorbed it all, probably not without pain, and gave wisdom and pleasure to the world.’²⁹

David certainly did appear to many people as the perfect gentleman-diplomat. Most people did not know much about his private pain or Vangie’s. The public-private non-distinction – or rather combination – is not entirely straightforward nor a synthesis in the strict sense; in fact, the Bruces did have a private life – that is, a life they rarely discussed or displayed – but this was their family life, not their ‘private’ (i.e. social) life. The former was neglected. David’s first marriage, as noted, turned out unhappily as his wife succumbed to mental illness; their only child, a daughter, was killed in an airplane crash in 1967. It was well known that Vangie was disliked intensely by her own offspring, who regarded her activities as being essentially in aid of herself.³⁰ For his part, David was said to have ‘no interest in children’ but the death in 1975 of another daughter was responsible, some people said, for his own death, from despair, in 1977.³¹ Sasha Bruce, like her two brothers, had been a morose teenager but managed to thrive amongst a group of close friends. Some years later she married a Greek man with a murky past and, sometime after that, was said to have been killed by him, although her death was never conclusively proved a murder.

David wrote very little about his family or its tragedies in his diary; there is even less evidence of Vangie’s thoughts and feelings on these subjects. Yet there is the remarkable book she wrote about the partnership of Napoleon and Josephine

which she called *The Improbable Marriage* (1995). It contains many observations on the role and mind of a woman in high politics, the precarious yet central position she holds, and the deliberate yet necessary cultivation of her social milieu. It was that milieu, not the marriage itself, that most intrigued Vangie. She recalled, 'I've just used the marriage as a frame. That way, I could cannibalize all my prior research, all the things I'm fascinated by.'³² Salons play in the foreground. 'Because feminine influence was obviously necessary for advancement in any field,' she observed, 'it was a shock to Bonaparte's vanity as well as to his hopes for the future to find that his appearance, manner and accent were all barriers to his success in the salons.' At the same time he was 'impressed and intimidated by the air of quiet elegance of Josephine's house' albeit an 'illusion' that he would soon both dispel and exploit: 'Its tone, with Napoleon's complicity, was set by her own *ancien régime* manners; her tact and courtesy reconciled to him many who would otherwise have been offended by his violently expressed republican sentiments.' Josephine, for her part, recognized and probably resented the contrast:

Although nothing in her past or her upbringing had prepared this commoner for her role, she, more than many royal wives had adopted herself to the discipline required of court life. Her naturalness, her faculty of instant recognition, her appearance of constant interest and attentiveness, and her readiness with the right word were truly regal. He admired all this and her smiling endurance in their official progresses around his immense territory. Undoubtedly, too, the man who appreciated theater in all its aspects recognized showmanship comparable to his own. . . . But although the Emperor felt that Josephine's presence provided the aura of an authentic court, he remained unsatisfied, shocked by the contrast between the Tuileries and the royal and imperial entourages he had so recently observed.³³

This was not true of Vangie's own marriage; David Bruce did not possess anything like a Napoleonic complex. But it fell to his wife to collaborate in his public and private success and to celebrate it as the embodiment of a social ideal. This led to a certain paradox inasmuch as her activity demanded perpetual motion: no treaties emerged from it; the point of the exercise, as diplomats like to say, was almost entirely procedural; and its effects rather were cumulative, amounting to 'life's work in terms of the work pursuing the woman instead of the reverse.'³⁴ This was how Vangie described Josephine's dramatic rise and fall: not so much as an appendage or even a catalyst to power, but as one with the vocation she acquired and the setting she dominated: 'essentially aristocratic, and only contingently feminine.' These qualities too were made fungible, at least in theory, by those overseeing their cultivation, the 'new Enlightenment couples,' so that, in the words of historian Steven Kale:

... [a] whole world of social arrangements and attitudes supported the[ir] existence . . . an idle aristocracy, an ambitious middle class, an active intellectual

life, the social density of a major urban center, sociable traditions, a certain aristocratic feminism. This world did not disappear in 1789. . . . Salons were a historically specific expression of the aristocracy's determination to regulate and control the transition from a hereditary to an open elite.³⁵

Transported to the milieu of the twentieth century, one finds a similar process of socialization under way in quasi-public (but nominally private) assemblages such as the Bilderberg Group, the Salzburg Seminar and others like them, including informal salons.³⁶ These elite gatherings and their predecessors, as several essays in this book make mention, were a form of public diplomacy in reverse where small groups discussed and promoted particular policies away from the public gaze but, according to their proponents, with the public interest at heart. This was not so simple as picking and choosing who was in or out of the club, although that surely happened to a degree; more importantly, it was the administration of what Michel Vovelle has called the 'entire network of new contacts,' which included not only 'social encounters' but also 'discursive practices.'³⁷ Diplomats call them the terms of reference.

Social networks are not just mirror images of diplomatic ones. They are the keys to understanding diplomacy as a social and a literary activity with regular political effect, not the other way around. A prosopographer would map this activity not as nodes or points of contact, but rather as connecting lines between and among such nodes. However much the Bruces were celebrated as personalities, their worth came from the forging and reassembling of collective personalities that magnified and extended their own. Vangie again made such a role possible, for no matter how ebullient and talented David may have been, without her salon, he was just another bureaucrat with political connections and fine taste; just as she, without him and all the accumulated prestige of his office, would have found it hard to be a diplomat.

IV

Bureaucratic, political and social markers of status sustained one another through ostensible deniability. Vangie abhorred the prospect of any news of her gatherings appearing in the press, and went to great lengths to ensure that they did not by way of close friendships with prominent journalists. Rarely does a professional diplomat like to see his or her name in the newspaper. Her self-effacement joined with that of her husband, and while neither emerged from the water entirely dry, neither self-destructed from too much ambition. They never remained in one place long enough for that to happen or to go out of style.

The figure of Vangie Bruce suggests that America's foreign policy apparatus at the country's peak of global influence in the twentieth century was more complex, and extended over much broader a social field, than is generally recognized by diplomatic historians. Like many of its individual members, it crossed official and geographic lines, and was something of a movable feast, back and forth between the capital and 'the field.' Like a well-planned dinner party, however, it followed

certain rules. The food served was secondary to the assembled conversation. The setting, including, as in diplomacy, everything down to the shape of the table, was tailored to the assembly of characters. From them the plot followed. This suggests something more than the need for a wider sociology of diplomacy. It is not just a matter of coming up with a longer and possibly more interesting checklist of actors. Prosopography of this kind is not an alternative or rival to Rankean history; rather it can serve as an important component of reconstructing narratives in more historically accurate, albeit more complicated, indirect, ways. To move a figure like Vangie Bruce to the foreground from the background, evidentiary challenges notwithstanding, would show at the very least that some episodes in international history – the saga of the European Defense Community mentioned by Mitford is one example – had as much to do with perceived gains or losses, benefits or costs, as they did with the enduring contest for prestige and favour. The causal relationship between the putative text and context of international relations appears then as more reciprocal and partnered than linear or subjective, much again as Vangie and David described their own relationship in action.

In this respect little has changed since the co-invention of modern diplomacy and the salon. A recent obituary of Henry Owen, a former U.S. government official and formidable socializer, for example, recalls the title he had borrowed for himself as coordinator of the summits of industrial nations during the Jimmy Carter administration: 'Sherpa . . . someone who does most of the necessary work in advance of a summit meeting so that the leader can show up and take credit for negotiating a good deal.'³⁸ In other words, a *salonnier* with an official, albeit exotic, title. The summits, today known as the G-7, G-8 and so on, incidentally began shortly before as an informal meeting of finance ministers in the Richard Nixon's White House library – a salon in the strict sense. 'In his quiet way,' said the former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, to whom Owen had given his first job in government back in the 1960s, 'he was profoundly influential.'³⁹ Influence is notoriously difficult to measure, and even more difficult to reconstruct. Nonetheless, such figures, their elaborate sense of taste and associations matter a great deal to history, particularly to diplomatic history.

Notes

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- 1 See, *inter alia*, Iver Neumann, 'To Be a Diplomat,' *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 6 (2005), pp72–93; the various works cited by Karen Gram-Skjoldager in 'Bringing the Diplomat Back In: Elements of a New Historical Research Agenda,' *EUI Working Paper RSCAS 2011/13*, European University Institute, 2011; and my book, *Atlantic Century*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2009, upon which this portrait is based.
- 2 Mattingly (1900–1962), American historian of early-modern Europe. Elliott (1930–), British historian of Spain.

- 3 J.R. and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye View of World History*, New York: Norton, 2003.
- 4 The term was coined by historians Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann. See their article, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,' *History and Theory*, vol. 45 (2006), pp30–50.
- 5 See John Bullion and Karl Schweizer, 'The Use of the Private Papers of Politicians in the Study of Policy Formulation during the 18th Century, the Bute Papers as a Case Study,' *Archives*, vol. 22 (1995), pp34–44.
- 6 See Iver B. Neumann, 'Autobiography, Ontology, Autoethnology,' *Review of International Studies*, vol. 36 (2010), pp1051–1055.
- 7 James Barron, 'Evangeline Bruce, 77, Hostess Known for Washington Soirées,' *New York Times*, 14 December 1995; Selwa Roosevelt, 'Very Interesting People: Americans in England Find Life is Swinging,' *Washington Post*, 4 May 1967; Maxine Cheshire, "'The Fourth Mrs. B" Nixon's Top Hostess?,' *Washington Post*, 11 November 1969. See also David Nash's description in this volume of Perle Mesta, the model for Ethel Merman's 'hostess with the mostest.'
- 8 'Mrs. Bruce on the Washington Salon,' *New York Times*, 11 May 1984.
- 9 'A Grande Dame's Grand Salon,' *Washington Post*, 6 April 1980.
- 10 The story is told in Nelson D. Lankford, *The Last American Aristocrat: The Biography of David K.E. Bruce, 1898–1977*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1996, pp169ff.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp48, 64, 169, 324, 405.
- 12 C. David Heymann, *The Georgetown Ladies' Social Club: Power, Passion, and Politics in the Nation's Capital*, New York: Atria Books, 2003, pp70–71; Lankford, pp172, 317, 351; Gloria Emerson, 'She Finds Life in Peking Exhilarating,' *New York Times*, 15 October 1973; Christopher Hitchens, 'The Courtier,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2007.
- 13 Author's conversation by telephone with Timothy Dickinson, 20 November 2011.
- 14 Lankford, pp6, 43.
- 15 Sophie de Margerie quoted by Eliane Sciolino (referring to Vangie's friend Susan Mary Alsop) in 'Lumière: D.C.'s Dinnertime Diplomacy,' *T Magazine (New York Times)*, 23 November 2011.
- 16 Nancy Matthews, 'Foreign Service Wife: A Study in Motion,' *Foreign Service Journal* January 1981, pp41ff.
- 17 David Bruce diary, May 16, 1949, State Department Lot Files, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; Heymann, p91; Lankford, p225.
- 18 Heymann, p92.
- 19 Lankford, p312.
- 20 Lankford, pp225, 315. A sample inventory of David Bruce's wine may be seen here: <http://www.wineterroirs.com/2009/11/ambassadorwines.html>, accessed 2 August 2014.
- 21 Heymann, pp84, 87. (His emphasis. The second part quotes the diplomat Charles Whitehouse.)
- 22 David Bruce diary, 20 August 1957.
- 23 Evangeline Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine: The Improbable Marriage*, New York: Scribner, 1995, p40; Mitchell Owens, 'The Improbable Author,' *New York Times*, 16 March 1995.
- 24 Nancy Mitford, *Don't Tell Alfred*, London: Penguin, 1963, pp64–65. The army referred to is the proposed European Defense Community, a multinational European force designed to integrate a rearming West Germany into a European institution. The French National Assembly rejected it in August 1954.
- 25 Cf. Katie Baker, 'Finding the Dragon Lady: In Search of Vietnam's Infamous Madame Nhu,' *Daily Beast*, 24 September 2013. Madame Nhu, incidentally, was the daughter of a celebrated Vietnamese *salonnière*.

- 26 Heymann, pp72–73, 84; E. Bruce, p387.
- 27 Heymann, px. This and related images of course have a long tradition. See, for example, Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- 28 Heymann, p55.
- 29 Quoted in Lankford, p407.
- 30 David and Vangie Bruce were not alone among their gilded generation to invite charges of decadence and selfish neglect. See Bill Patten, *My Three Fathers and the Elegant Deceptions of My Mother, Susan Mary Alsop*, New York: Public Affairs, 2008.
- 31 Lankford, pp98, 235, 350. Following her daughter's death, Vangie established the Sasha Bruce House as a sanctuary for troubled youth.
- 32 Quoted in Owens, 'The Improbable Author.'
- 33 E. Bruce, pp153, 196, 418.
- 34 Jeanice Brooks, 'Noble et grande servant de la musique: Telling the Story of Nadia Boulanger's Conducting Career,' *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 14 (1996), p100. See also pp102, 114f. Cf. the opposite case of Nancy Astor, in Bee Wilson, 'Musical Chairs with Ribbentrop,' *London Review of Books*, 20 December 2012.
- 35 Steven D. Kale, 'Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons,' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 25 (2002), pp124, 134, 143. Cf. Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, Chapters 3 and 4.
- 36 See, for example, Giles Scott-Smith, 'Ghosts in the Machine? Ernst van der Beugel, the Transatlantic Elite, and the "New Diplomatic History,"' Lecture given at Leiden University, 5 October 2009.
- 37 Kale, p124.
- 38 Paul Vitello, 'Henry D. Owen, 91, Dies; Shaped Global Fiscal Order,' *New York Times*, 12 November 2011.
- 39 Ibid.