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# **Novelists and Poets In Disguise:** **Publications by Diplomats as Literary** **Works** <sup>[1]</sup>

Writing skills are an essential requirement for diplomats. Writing is a daily task for them. In "negotiation mode," they assume the related variant of drafting skills, which may require convergence with negotiating skills with a view to finding language that is acceptable to different parties sometimes with diametrically opposing positions. In "deliberations mode," these skills are geared toward speech writing often involving rhetorical devices and storytelling. When back in the office, they are dedicated to report writing, in a more structured and sometimes rigid template format, practicing what is often termed professional writing. While the delineation line between professional and creative writings is clear, crossing that line is also possible for those who possess the talent, the will to exercise it, and the means to demonstrate through a publication.

Hence diplomatic writings are well qualified to contribute to the world of literature and literary works, within the different definitions of these terms. They are especially suited to contribute to inter-cultural relations, and form part of comparative literature by very nature of their professional background necessitating immersion in foreign societies and representation of one's own.

## **Living Abroad – Writing at Home**

Diplomats not only possess the basic skill required for creative writing that is mastery of the language, and they also enjoy the privilege of exposure to other societies and knowledge of foreign societies relatively more than many, if not most, other strata of society. Their literary work is therefore likely to excel in presenting their own communities in a way that is easily read by, and captivating to, foreign readers.

On the other hand, they may also feature these bring these foreign societies to their own home while drawing parallels and explaining differences. In other words, diplomats writers, by definition of their profession, enjoy an almost exclusive access to "material" that is ripe for use for literary work, of course if they have the talent to process it into a product that is 'sellable' to the consumers. They are, once again, agents of comparison, but this time comparative literature not only comparative development. In Ambassador Jazbec's words "[...] diplomats that exploit diplomacy in their writing, draw from their practical experiences as well as the understanding of diplomacy. They use their personal, memoir-istic aspects [...]." ([Jazbec, M., 2023. p201](#))

## **Consular Work, Migration Aspects and Societal Dynamics**

Part of diplomatic work is consular services. In large part, this is the organic link for the diplomat living abroad with their home country. There is an added specificity when dealing

with the migrants abroad is that they represent a specific segment of their population which is naturally more engaged with the host country, to different degrees depending on where they are then living in it on temporary or permanent basis. Publications on any such cases are likely to forge the link closer with the country of origin and explore the growing link with country of residence and destination. Such works would be of much relevance to studies of migration, a growing phenomenon receiving increasing attention worldwide.

Consular work also exposes the diplomat to the societal dynamics that not all diplomats, in fact not all other professions, are equally knowledgeable of. It may include some more routine issues, if we may call them so, such as marriage, births certificates, inheritance and the like. It may also include cases that are "out of the ordinary" such as gaining access, and ensuring proper lawyer defense, to those accused of crimes, in many forms. Such engagement with cases reflecting many aspects of societal dynamics provide ample material for documentary and fictional literary works, should there be the will and talent necessary.

### **Diplomats Writings Telling About Oneself: Memoirs and autobiographies**

While diplomats do publish literary work including fiction, one main genre may feature more prominently in their writings. They tell about themselves. They write their memoirs in the form of autobiographies. (In the case of Italian diplomats, Baldi reminds us that "Many diplomats have published books while in active service, others only after retirement. These books are often autobiographies, professional memoirs, or historical essays" [Baldi, 2006, p 17]). This may be the easiest for the diplomat-writers by simply recounting the life and professional events they went through. It may also be the most interesting for the readers given not only the specificities of the life of a diplomat in engaging in often high level events in multiple fields, but also that many of such engagements are often not public, or at least not fully covered by traditional media. Writing about such events may hence satisfy the reader's curiosity to know more about these internal happenings.

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**"A truly skilled diplomat is a potential poet and author. Just open the door, and free them from the constraints of the list of the 'diplomatic corps.'"**

Critique of autobiographies would naturally apply to those written by diplomats as well, including aspects related to objectivity, accuracy, comprehensiveness. When such autobiographies are more of literary works, then additional criteria may be applied related to the creativity in presenting the material, the style and other forms of literary critique.

### **Poetry and Diplomats Writers: Storytelling and Symbolism**

One specific form of literary works is poetry. It may be particularly suited for diplomats' writers for several reasons. One is for its heavy use of rhetorical devices including alliteration (Scott, Biljana, 2022), imagery especially in the form of metaphors and analogies, and powerful language. All these also form part and parcel of speechwriting which diplomats are expected to be masters of. There is hardly an official diplomatic function without a speech, let alone dinner speeches which are even expected to be more creative and rely on storytelling.

For those diplomats who master this essential task of their profession and who undertake it more creatively rather than daily routine, they possess the skill and own the material that is readily transferable to literary works, including poetry should they choose to, and should they master its rules and style. Daunais, & Hepburn (2020, p5) go as far as saying that:

*“Diplomacy and novel-writing are [...] homologous activities: writing communiqués and promoting national culture through ancillary functions at an embassy, all while preserving an air of detachment, have a corollary in the writing of chapters and promoting a point of view through the decidedly oblique activity of narrating fictional events, all while keeping one’s distance from those imagined situations.*

In the same line, Ambassador Papadopoulos in his book *Diplomacy and Poetry: The Case of Giorgos Seferis*, writes that the poet's experiences as a diplomat profoundly influenced Seferis's work, as he documented these impacts in many of his poems. His frequent relocations to different countries, along with the constant changes in his environment—new homes, new friends, and varying cultural references—provided him with a rich source of inspiration and a unique sensibility in his poetry. Being distanced from Greece allowed him to place it within a global context, prompting reflections on the human experience that transcends borders and political boundaries. Furthermore, his daily professional engagement with language shaped his poetic style, leading him to strive for simplicity and clarity in expression, making his work both accessible and profound (Papadopoulos, P., 2020, May 30).

Poetry may be particularly suited for the writing talent of diplomats, especially those in the field of multilateral diplomacy who are used to the interplay of words, and the use of ambiguities (See Parvatiyar, D., 2018, May 9). as well as a rich lexicon of synonyms that help them overcome deadlocks in negotiations and achieve agreement when it seemed to be far. It is worth noting that ambiguity in this context is not necessarily negative. Rather it is creative use and rich mastery of language. After all, Kurbalija reminds us that “diplomats have to use constructive ambiguities to bridge differences that are irreconcilable. Creating a bridge between complex reality and its representation in one text makes diplomats masters of language and text – and well prepared for writing” (Baldi, 2006, p 9). Multilateral diplomacy is, once again, a particularly suited forum for such use. It is interesting to note here is that a well-established tradition of the third committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations to conclude its annual session with a poem recital from both the Egyptian and UK delegations, often describing their ‘work’ in the previous months (United Nations, 2024, March 21).

Other than diplomats being skilled in the related style of language and expressions, it can be argued that poetry may be particularly suited for them, given that it relies also on symbolism and indirect inferences. This may give diplomats, especially those still in active service more leeway to publish using the space that allows evading direct references that may not be suited to their official function. Baldi (2006, p172) reminds that Francis Walder insisted on a relation between diplomacy and poetry where “diplomats are poets since their thoughts are often unformulated and vague”.

## **The High Achievers of Nobel Laureates**

Given this strong, almost organic, link of diplomats’ writers to literary works and literature, it is not surprising that a number of them have achieved the highest awards up to the status of Nobel Literature Laureates. In his seminal work titled "Diplomacy and Literature: The Eight

Winning Diplomats of The Nobel Prize for Literature," Amb. Trichilo (2023) explores the careers of diplomat-writers linking the features of these two professional lives that united in one person each of the eight Laureates.

While the author presents the Laureates chronologically, similar traits are identified through a relatively similar structure of each chapter, ending with a section on "diplomatic career," which he admits was difficult to research. Drawing conclusions from a more thorough comparison of the Laureates offers food for thought for potential future research answering questions such as the similarities or divergences in diplomatic careers, writing style and subject matters covered among other questions. A few answers are available in the rich discussion that took place on the book (Aljowaily, A., & Baldi, S., 2023, July 9).

## **Conclusions**

Diplomats may be inborn writers. They possess the skill. Their life provides plenty of material for reflecting on, including in comparative from relevant to readers both from home and host states. If we add to this the consular experience, that will provide cases and stories of migration and societal dynamics especially of diaspora and expatriates. When diplomats write to talk about themselves through memoirs, their most distinct genre is apparent through autobiographies. Another genre that is especially ripe for reaping by diplomats writers is poetry. It builds on their writing skills and thrives on their rhetorical mastery of storytelling and symbolism, itself another form of signaling which they practice daily in their profession.

With these linkages, no wonder that among diplomats' literary publications, the high achievers were eight Nobel Laureates.

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