EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Poetry and Peacemaking: Joachim du Bellay and the Truce of Vaucelles

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The truce is an institution both revered and scorned. In much diplomatic writing, the fragility and importance of the truce are understood through its contrast to the full-scale treaty. Writing in the 1560s, Jean Bodin notes in his *Six Livres de la République* that the truce is always more holy and less violable than a peace treaty. By this he means that, whereas treaties are codified and written down, the truce is based purely on good will, on the strength of one's word. Thus, it should never be broken. When we speak of the truce we speak of the moment of presence, the moment at which diplomats, who are generally linked to the practice of fixing action in writing, must rely completely on the word of their adversaries to stop violence now.[1] The truce is the first tentative step toward the future, rooted in the present. It is the moment of opening, when the uncertainty of war is replaced by the most delicate of certainties. As Nir Eisikovits has noted, in a modern account of the truce, this moment of good will also involves a recognition of the humanity of the Other. It is the point at which someone previously perceived as only worth killing is now seen as worth talking to. Whereas the treaty, as a form of writing, aims at 'freezing' the Other by limiting what he can or cannot do, the truce asks only that he not kill.[2]

[1] Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République*, ed. by Christiane Frémont, Marie-Dominique Couzinet, and Henri Rochais (Paris: Fayard, 1986), Book V, Chapter 6, p. 225. Here is Bodin's French: 'toujours les trefves sont plus sacrees, et moins violables que la paix'. He goes on to note that those who have violated truces have a fate that is 'misérable', and that broken truces are often the ruin of states. On the strictures around treaty making for the definition of 'true peace', see Samuel Garrett Zeitlin, 'Francis Bacon on Peace and the 1604 Treaty of London', *History of Political Thought* (forthcoming). My thanks to Dr Zeitlin for sharing his text with me.

[2] Nir Eisikovits, *A Theory of Truces* (London: Palgrave, 2016). The idea of recognizing the humanity of the Other in warfare (no matter what side) is stressed, in an early modern context, by Blaise de Monluc, in his *Commentaires: 1521-1576*. See the edition of Paul Courteault (Paris Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964), p. 25.

And yet, within the context of early modern diplomatic culture, the shift from an official state of war to a more familiar or intimate situation of conversation also opens the possibility that the peacemaking process might be hijacked or distorted. The value of treaties is that they codify exchanges and establish limits. Truces are much more ambiguous. As the Italian diplomatic theorist, Gasparo Bragaccia, wrote in his 1626 treatise, *L'Ambasciatore*, the danger with truces is that private interests such as courtly intrigues or family rivalries – what he calls 'private querele' – might undermine the 'causa publica', and distort the balance envisioned by the accord.[3]

In what follows I want to focus on two features of the truce hinted at in these theoretical accounts: the first is the fragility of the truce, the fact that it is less elaborately negotiated and not ratified in the ways that treaties are. This means that the meaning and efficacy of the truce is deeply reliant on how it is perceived or framed. The second, related, issue is the truce's relationship to time, the sense that it may well come suddenly, elicit quick responses, and disappear just as quickly. Indeed, truces come and go so quickly that Bodin reflects on the situation of a French diplomat who tries to leave England during a truce, encounters a storm at sea and is cast back up after the truce has ended. Bodin wonders what the diplomatic status of such a legate would be. Should he be killed? Bodin says he should not.[4]

To study these two features of the truce, I want to look at how it is depicted in lyric poetry. Poetry, after all, is the literary form that most directly asks us to think about the voice of the single individual. It registers the impress of external events on the self. Moreover, poetry is very often occasional, especially in the early modern period. Thus truces, which are contingent, often sudden, events, intersect easily with poems, which are generated in response to shifts in political life, or emotional climate. Poetry offers a space in which we can reflect on the relationship between peacemaking and the status of the individual – as subject, as political actor, as witness.

The Truce of Vaucelles

[3] Gasparo Bragaccia, *L'Ambasciatore* (Rome: Vecchiarelli Editore, 1989), Book 3, Chapter 5, p. 247. On the problem of the inherent ambiguity of diplomatic strategies and actions, see Nathalie Rivère de Carles's 'The Poetics of Appeasement in the Early Modern Era', in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theater and Soft Power:. The Making of Peace* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 6-8.

[4] This anecdote comes at the end of the fifth book of Bodin's *République*, and appears to have been added after the first edition, on which I've based my own reading of the French. It may be found in the English translation by Richard Knolles, *The Six Books of a Commonweale* (London, 1616), p. 636.

One of the most dramatic truces in the early modern period was the 1556 Truce of Vaucelles, between the French king Henry II and the Spanish ruler Philip II – with the support of the English under Mary Tudor. I say that it was 'dramatic' because it came about so suddenly and unexpectedly that observers in all camps were surprised. As Lucien Romier has noted in his canonical account of the political machinations during the period, the truce created 'a painful situation'[5] among observers who had taken pro-war positions on all sides of the Franco-Spanish conflict. This included actors at the Vatican, exiles from Florence, and representatives of the Holy Roman Empire. For his part, the Spanish king was fully preparing for war against the French. Thus, the Truce disrupted political expectations and surprised observers on all sides.

The Truce of Vaucelles was the masterpiece of the French minister Anne de Montmorency and his nephew, the Huguenot, Gaspard de Coligny. It was negotiated against the backdrop of attempts by the ultra-Catholic Guise Family working with the Pope, Paul IV, who hated the Hapsburgs, to incite war against the Spanish that could lead, so it was thought by the French in Rome, to a French recovery of control over Naples. As negotiations were heating up in Rome, the news of the Truce arrived like a bombshell. No one was expecting it. When the news reached Rome on February 21, 1556, the Pope flew into a rage. Feeling that he had been betrayed by the French king, Henry II, and consumed by his hatred for Philip II, Paul was nearly incapacitated and refused even to preach for the coming Lent services. Thus, the Truce placed the French in Rome – among them the poet Joachim du Bellay – in a position of total ambiguity. On the one hand, peace had broken out. That seemed to be a good thing. On the other hand, the news placed the French in a very dubious light, branded as 'traitors', as they tried to work with their Roman diplomatic contacts.[6]

It is worth stressing the curious temporality of this particular truce. The French chronicler the Maréchal de Thou, whose exhaustive 'history of the times', offers a near-contemporary guide to the events, argues that the entire pretext for the Truce, as well as for the subsequent treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, came from the fact that the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who was relinquishing power, did not believe his son, Philip II, was competent to take on the foreign policy responsibilities with which he would be faced. So, he sought to calm things down until Philip could get up to speed. On this view,

[5] Lucien Romier, *Les Origines Politiques des Guerres de Religion* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974; original edition, 1913), p. 45: 'A la cour de France même, dont les membres étaient en majorité de goûts belliqueux, la trêve créa une situation pénible'.

[6] For background on the Roman situation see Romier, II, pp. 44-56. All translations are by me.

Vaucelles was a kind of delaying tactic. It was public action undertaken for personal, even familial, reasons. In this regard, it underscores the ways in which the truce, perhaps more than any other genre of diplomatic action, lies at the intersection of public and personal interests. Philip, on the other hand, was not personally supportive of the Truce at all. ‘He trusted’, in the later words of the English historian and philosopher David Hume, ‘the intrigues of the cabinet, where, he believed, his caution and secrecy and prudence gave him the superiority, he should be able to subdue all his enemies, and extend his authority and dominion’.[7] So, when the Truce was agreed upon and Henry published it, quickly in Metz, Philip delayed publication and only made it public a bit later in Flanders (as de Thou says, ‘parce qu’il ne vouloit pas qu’elle durast si long temps’ [‘because he didn’t want it to last long’]), and, later still, in Italy, where, as we know, it caused a scandal.[8] Thus Charles sees the truce as a delay, almost as part of his son’s education. Philip, who is trying to emerge from his father’s shadow and demonstrate his mastery of statecraft, seeks to undermine it through delaying tactics of his own. Yet it was completely unexpected and sudden in the eyes of observers.

For all of its tangled motivations and effects, the Truce was the result of a set of strategic compromises. The occasion for the initial negotiation was a liberation of prisoners from highly placed families on both sides. The French were quickly able to receive concessions and force the Spanish to agree to ransoms, several of which were quite lavish. In addition, the lands of Robert de la Marck, the duke of Bouillon, son-in-law of the French king’s mistress, were to be returned to France. Following initial agreements about prisoners, the Spanish realized that things were moving too quickly and received instructions from their king to slow things down (more delay). In order to do this the Imperial diplomats threw every type of obstacle in the way of further negotiations. They pretended to ask for an English mediation, even though they did not want one. However, these tactics, which the Hapsburg negotiators undertook to try to force the hand of the French, had the effect of making the Spanish look weak, as if they were simply trying to avoid instituting the initial agreements about prisoner exchange.[9] The lesson would seem to be that you should not take the first steps in a negotiation unless you want to move ahead quickly. Otherwise, you will look weak. Finally, the Spanish negotiators took the extreme measure of claiming that nothing that had been agreed to could take effect because they did not, in fact, have their powers with them, and thus had no real authority to negotiate anyway. This trick was quickly seen through by the French, who announced that the negotiations had broken

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[7] David Hume, *History of England*, ed. by William B. Todd (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983) III, 443. My thanks to Samuel Garrett Zeitlin for pointing me to Hume’s text.

[8] De Thou, p. 918.

[9] Ibid, p. 917.

down. They offered the idea of a truce as a kind of escape route, that would enable the Spanish to save face, despite their defeats over the prisoner situation. In return, the Spanish attained concessions from the French that would leave Spanish conquests in Italy in place and forbid the French from allying themselves with the Turks. Both sides acknowledged that nothing would change regarding maritime activity, free trade, or the status of America. Thus, the international situation remained absolutely static, with both sides remaining where they were. The two losers in the accord were the Pope and the Turkish Sultan. In fact, Henry II had been in correspondence with the Sultan, asking him for a fleet that could sail and help to put pressure on the Spanish. When the Truce was agreed on, however, the Sultan regretted his support of the French, since the agreement meant that he was suddenly marginalized in European politics, officially, if not unofficially, and now less empowered to play the French and the Spanish off against each other.[10]

What makes this truce particularly interesting, then, is the imbrication of a set of accords that are seen as ambiguous on both sides, with the unexpectedness of the event. Once the news of the accord began to be circulated, it seemed to offer a contrast between the perceived failures of the Spanish in negotiation, and the perceived failures of the French. To explore this double-faced aspect of the event, we can turn to the most acute French observer of diplomatic activity during the period. This was the poet Joachim du Bellay. Du Bellay was in Rome at the time of the Truce, in the service of his cousin, the French ambassador Jean du Bellay. He hated Rome and commented endlessly on the corruption of the Papal court. His poetic treatment of the disruptive ambiguity characterizing the truce can help us understand how poetry both represents and responds to political events. Indeed, in an era when 'occasional' poetry was an important form of literary creation, Du Bellay's response to Vaucelles can help us see why poetry was understood to be an important appendage to political action.

Poetic Accounts of the Truce of Vaucelles: The Suspension of Action

If the politics of the Truce of Vaucelles is interwoven with dramas of personal rivalry and confrontation, we should not be surprised to see poetic accounts of the same events

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[10] For these details on the actual workings of the negotiation, see Bertrand Haan, *Une Paix Pour l'Eternité: La Négociation du Traité du Cateau-Cambrésis* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010), chapter 3. Haan explores how the truce laid the ground for the much more important treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis several years later. Monluc claims to have foreseen from the outset the failure of the Truce, but he also notes that the complicated alliances and commitments binding the two monarchs made it necessary: 'voylà pourquoy on fit ceste trefve' (*Commentaires*, p. 387).

negotiating between images of collective experience and personal anguish. The making of peace is a not infrequent theme of Renaissance poetry, but it is generally celebrated in long poetic forms. In 1544, the French poet Clément Marot had written in celebration of the French victory at Cerisole, under the command of François de Bourbon. Du Bellay's friend Pierre de Ronsard, in 1550, had answered with an ode on the same topic, asserting that Marot's achievement was inadequate to the occasion, and failed to praise the general enough: 'Marot... n'egala pas / Les merites de ta gloire' ['Marot never equaled / The merits of your glory'].[11] This kind of boastful rhetoric is conventional in Renaissance triumphal poetry, which usually celebrates martial victories. The praise of peace is more problematic. Poetry in praise of war can focus on the great deeds of the general or prince. The act that is the poem mimics the actions of the hero in battle. By contrast, the peace treaty simply shuts things down.

If poetry is conventionally shaped by praise of action, how can one praise those who decide no longer to act? Ronsard confronts this problem in a poem from the third book of his *Odes* (1550), where he sings the peace between François Ier and Henry VIII by simply turning to a friend, Maclou de la Haie, and encouraging him to tune up his lute, drink some wine, and go to work writing more poetry.[12] This auto-referential dimension of poetry about peace suggests the difficulty faced by a poetry of praise when what is being praised is the cessation of military hostility.

Du Bellay wrote a long-form poem to Henry II in praise of the Truce of Vaucelles, called 'Discours au Roy sur la Trefve de l'an MDLV'. He begins that poem by describing a scene of the hunt – a classic topos for depicting martial courage. Yet Du Bellay paints the king, not as a hunter, but as a lioness who, when her cubs (the French) are threatened, does not attack the threatening hunters. Rather she protects her young. This curious opening then leads to Du Bellay's claim that the Truce of Vaucelles has been a triumph for the French. The Spanish have signed on out of fear, out of a sense of necessity. The Spanish king, exhausted trying to defeat the French, has decided to abandon his hostility:

> Ce que voyant Cesar, & perdant l'esperance
> D'enjamber plus avant sur les bornes de France,
> A choisy pour le mieulx d'oublier la rancueur
> Qui avoit si long temps regné dedans son cueur,
> Et pour n'entretenir une guerre si chere,

[11] Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Jean Céard et al (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993), I, 614. This is from Book 1, # 6, of the *Odes*.
[12] Ronsard, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I, p. 1006.

A receu de la Paix l'heureuse messagere,
La Trefve bien heureuse, & profitable à tous
Mais plus utile à luy, & plus louable à vous (ll.65-72)[13]

Seeing all this [the king's virtue], and losing hope
Of ever pushing further on the borders of France,
Caesar [the Emperor] has thought it better to forget the rancor
That had reigned for so long in his heart,
And in order to pursue no longer an expensive war,
He received the happy messenger of Peace,
The happy Truce, profitable to all,
More useful to him, and more praiseworthy to you.

In this account, the Truce means different things to different people. The French king's martial virtue generates a change of heart in the enemy. He gives up hatred – while also saving money! The language of diplomacy makes an appearance in the mini-allegory whereby Charles welcomes the 'messenger' of Peace (with the 'messenger' here connoting both a message and an ambassador). The symbolic capital redounds to the French. The Spanish are merely grasping at straws to protect themselves.

This is not merely flattery of the monarch. For Du Bellay is also making a point about the importance of collective experience, of what he calls 'le bien public' (l.77). Du Bellay praises the king's virtue, not for his courageous victories, but for his self-control. He calls his judgment 'mature', or 'meur' (l.57). For the good of Christendom, the king has stepped into his role as *Rex Christianissimus*, as the traditional leader of the Gallican Church: 'Avez donté vous mesmes; et pour le commun bien / Vous estes souvenue d'estre Roy Treschrestien' (ll. 147-8) ['You have tamed yourself for the common good / You remembered to be the Most Christian King']. This is good humanist counsel, in which the poet stresses that the good of the whole is also what redounds to the honor of the king. The argument is political, but also moral. And yet, as the poem ends, Du Bellay praises both the Huguenot-leaning diplomats who brokered the Truce, and the ultra-Catholic Cardinal of Lorraine, a member of the Guise family, who was trying to stir up strife in Rome. The king, like a lioness protecting her young, is both brave and prudent. This bit

[13] *Discours au Roy sur la Trefve de L'an M.M.LV.* (Paris: Morel, 1561). My citations and line numbers come from David Hartley, *A Critical Edition of the Circumstantial Verse of Joachim Du Bellay* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000), 77-80. Hartley's notes point out that the opening image of the lioness comes from Statius's *Thebaid*. The discourse may be found as well in Henri Chamard's edition of Du Bellay's *Oeuvres Poétiques* (Paris: Textes Littéraires Français, 1908-1931), VI, I.

of flattery makes it possible for Du Bellay to mediate the tension between the two competing factions in French politics. This is followed, as in the Ronsard poem I cited earlier, by a promise of more poetry. If the French can remain unified, says Du Bellay, they can attack the Holy Land, and he might write an epic singing the praises of the king. And as the poem ends he backs off on that promise, saying that others (his friend Ronsard) are better suited for epic. By contrast, his job is to gather up the 'relics' of the king's virtue ('des autres vertus recueillant les reliques' [l.248]), as the gleaner gathers the harvest. Thus, Du Bellay, in the long poem, can only account for the suddenness and ambiguity of the Truce by staking out a set of different positions and defining a kind of anti-heroism (as protective lioness) for his heroic king.

To appreciate the effect of the Truce on Du Bellay's poetic self-construction it is useful to set this piece of circumstantial verse next to his 1558 sonnet collection, *Les Regrets*. The collection expresses Du Bellay's misery at his lot and comments satirically on the seemingly bottomless corruption of the Papal Court of Paul IV. Du Bellay announces the *Regrets* as being somewhat unlike other poetry collections, in that it will not take grand themes such as philosophy or nature as its subject matter:

> Je ne veux point fouiller au sein de la nature,
> Je ne veux point chercher l'esprit de l'univers,
> Je ne veux point sonder les abîmes couverts,
> Ni dessiner du ciel la belle architecture.
>
> [I do not want to grope around in the breast of nature,
> I do not want to look for the spirit of the universe,
> I do not want sound out hidden depths,
> Or draw the beautiful architecture of heaven.]

So begins the collection, through a rejection of great cosmic and scientific themes. Instead, says Du Bellay, his poetry will be generated out of the daily life of the working functionary. His poems will cry or laugh as he does, as a kind of variable record of his state of mind. He will speak as a Frenchman in Rome, as a voice, not of official French policy, but of an individual identity, a sensibility. This offers a more intimate vision of diplomatic poetics than what we saw in the discourse to the king. So, he writes in the opening sonnet, describing the entire project:

> Je me plains à mes vers, si j'ai quelque regret:
> Je me ris avec eux, je leur dis mon secret,
> Comme étant de mon cœur les plus sûrs secrétaires

[I complain to my verses, if I have a regret
I laugh with them, I tell them my secret,
For they are the most certain secretaries of my heart.] [14]

Thus these poems are close to journalism, or journalistic commentary. He calls them 'secretaries', a term with both psychological resonances ('secret' documents of the self) and diplomatic senses. And, indeed, this collection is one of the major accounts of the psychological and emotional impact of diplomatic life on those who served in ambassadorial contexts. Thus, it can help us grasp the 'private' dimension of diplomatic activity that Bragaccia alluded to in the passage we saw earlier. Moreover, because Du Bellay is working in the tradition of the sonnet collection, we can explore how his manipulation of discourse in the lyric poem – that most 'personal' and 'private' of literary forms – registers and responds to public events.

Du Bellay's contemporary Olivier de Magny, the secretary to the French Ambassador d'Avanson (to whom Du Bellay dedicated the *Regrets*) had also confronted in sonnet form the problems raised by the Truce of Vaucelles. His volume, *Les Souspirs* (1557) featured several topical poems in which he calls out the different members of the Roman court, noting how each one's expectations have been thwarted by the truce: 'Mon Dieu, que ceste trêve a le nez allongé / A ceux là de qui moins elle estoit attendue!' ['My God, what a long nose this Truce has / For those who least expected it!']. D'Avanson was in Rome trying unsuccessfully to negotiate a military alliance with the Pope against the hated Spanish. Magny laments that the Truce has undermined the political efforts of his boss. However, he probes no further the larger implications of the Truce, noting simply of d'Avanson, that 'it was not his fault'.[15] Magny's text consists of a loose collection of

[14] Joachim du Bellay, *Les Regrets*, edited by S. de Sacy (Paris: NRF Poésie/Gallimard, 1967), #124. All translations are by me. I have also worked with the edition of J. Jolliffe (Geneva: Droz, Textes Littéraires Français, 1979). For the general poetic context of Du Bellay's collection see Richard Cooper, 'Poetry in Ruins: The Literary Context of du Bellay's Cycles on Rome', *Renaissance Studies* 3.2 (1989), 156-66. Cooper's collection of essays, *Litterae in tempore belli* (Geneva: Droz, 1997) provides a wealth of information about Du Bellay's life in Rome. On the rhetoric of the *Regrets* in the tradition of humanist epistolary discourse see the excellent study by Marc Bizer, *Les lettres romaines de Du Bellay* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2001). On Du Bellay's satirical contempt for the Roman carnival see Thomas M. Greene, 'Regrets Only: Three Poetic Paradigms in Du Bellay', *Romanic Review* 84 (1993), 1-18.

[15] Olivier de Magny, *Les Souspirs* (Paris: Vincent Sertenas, 1557), #125, cited in Romier, *Les Origines*, p. 45. I have worked as well with the edition of David Wilkin (Geneva: Droz, 1978). The reflection on d'Avanson's blameless failure of policy comes in #119. Eric MacPhail provides a useful account of Magny's 'dialogue' with Du Bellay in his book *The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature*

satirical pieces, lamenting the bad life in a Rome of unfaithful women and austere budgets. It contrasts with Du Bellay's text which offers a coherent 'narrative' progression through events. Du Bellay gives us his vision of Roman decadence. He laments certain forms of corruption (sexual mores, excess luxury), describes Roman customs, and traces his own disillusionment, leading to the moment at which he returns to France, journeys home, and finds yet more disappointment in the French court.

The central section of Du Bellay's *Regrets* features a series of poems that satirize the Roman Carnival and the court of Pope Paul IV. In Sonnet #110, Du Bellay draws a contrast between the good French king and the corrupt Roman pontiff by comparing spring to winter and peace to war. Yet he goes on to note that what passes for martial valor in Rome is nothing more than fakery. While his friends in France are discussing serious matters, writes Du Bellay in sonnet 121, he is forced to waste his time watching bullfights at the Carnival:

> Dresser un grand apprest, faire attendre long temps,
> Puis donner a la fin un maigre passetemps:
> Voila tout le plaisir des festes Romanesques
>
> [We watch them go through a big preparation, make everyone wait a long time,
> Then finally present a poor show:
> There you have the fun of the Roman festivals.]

He focuses on the cruelty of the Carnival activities, which torment captured bulls and torture bisons. The Roman festival, with its fake version of martial courage, is a marker of Roman decadence. Thus Du Bellay's poem mocks fake courage on the assumption that there is real heroism to be found elsewhere, among the French. But then, suddenly, a moment later, peace breaks out.

Du Bellay announces the Truce with four sonnets that shift direction, taking us away from his account of the Carnival. At one level, there is a thematic link between the two, since the Carnival is itself a kind of break or 'special moment' in the normal year, when labor is set aside for celebration. Yet that celebration is itself violent and contrasts with the

(Saratoga, CA: ANMA Libri, 1990). See, as well, A.R. Mackay, 'Olivier de Magny's Roman Sketches', in *Crossroads and Perspectives: French Literature of the Renaissance: Studies in Honour of Victor E. Graham*, ed. by Catherine M. Grisé and C.D.E. Tolton (Geneva: Droz, 1986), 49-64. Mackay focuses on the 'lightness' of Magny's style. For an excellent account of how lyric poetry functions as a gift in diplomatic activity, see Paul Hulsenboom's discussion of Dutch mediations between Poland-Litnuania and Sweden in 'Diplomats as Poets, Poets as Diplomats', *Legatio* 3 (2019), 63-110.

mock combat of the bullfight. Du Bellay now reports on a cessation of violence. Set next to the empty spectacle of the Carnival, the Truce seems to offer something of importance.

The Form of the Truce: Political Drama and Poetic Voice

The poems dealing with the Truce of Vaucelles differ dramatically in their tone and focus from both Magny's account, and the poems around them. In a sense, they offer a kind of repertoire of possible frames for the Truce. Here is poem #123:

> Nous ne sommes fâchés que la trêve se fasse:
> Car bien que nous soyons de la France bien loin,
> Si est chacun de nous à soi-même témoin
> Combien la France doit de la guerre être lasse.
>
> Mais nous sommes fâchés que l'espagnole audace,
> Qui plus que le Français de repos a besoin,
> Se vante avoir la guerre et la paix en son poing,
> Et que de respirer nous lui donnons espace.
>
> Il nous fâche d'ouïr nos pauvres alliés
> Se plaindre à tous propos qu'on les ait oubliés,
> Et qu'on donne au privé de l'utilité commune.
>
> Mais ce qui plus nous fâche est que les étrangers
> Disent plus que jamais que nous sommes légers,
> Et que nous ne savons connaître la fortune.
>
> [We are not angry that the truce has come about
> For even though we are far from France,
> Each of us, himself, is a witness
> To how tired France must be of war.
>
> But we are angry that Spanish arrogance,
> Which needs a break more than the French does,
> Is bragging about holding war and peace in its fist,
> And that we have given them a space to breathe.
>
> We are angry when we hear our poor allies

> Complain that we have abandoned them,
> And that we have turned the common good over to private interests.
>
> But what angers us most of all is that foreigners
> Say that, more than ever before, we are light,
> And that we cannot seize fortune.]

This poem is remarkable for its sudden shifts in tone and focus. First off, Du Bellay expresses his sympathy with the misery that has been endured by the people back in France. His announcement of the Truce begins with the assertion that ‘we are not angry that the truce has come about’. This interesting opening line points to the ambiguities of diplomatic representation, in which the diplomat is both a representative of his prince and a member of a nation. Du Bellay’s self-creation as a ‘French’ identity or sensibility – a more intimate version of official diplomatic representation – is expressed in the idea that he and his fellows are witnesses to the suffering of their nation. They are the ideal observers of their own pain.

Yet the first quatrain is then reversed as we learn what Du Bellay is irritated by. This is that the Truce has elicited harsh judgements about the French among the diplomatic community in Rome. Here we come to the problem of how the Truce can be interpreted or framed. For it turns out that everyone in Rome is whispering that the Spanish have come out better in the negotiations. In fact, the Truce has only strengthened their hand because the French are now giving them time to breathe: ‘de respirer nous lui donnons espace’, he laments in line 8. The Truce is a pause, a break in time. This undermines the idealized vision of truces we signaled at the outset of this essay, where the truce becomes the moment of recognizing the Other. Here the moment of calm brought on by the Truce only benefits one side. In fact, it is perceived by allies as a betrayal, a triumph of the ‘private’ over the ‘common good’. Thus, what is good for the French is bad for French foreign policy. The truce drives a wedge between Du Bellay’s sensibility as a Frenchman in solidarity with his suffering countrymen, on the one hand, and his professional need to keep up appearances in the diplomatic world of Rome, on the other.

And it’s even worse for French reputation, since the word on the street is that the French king has failed to seize Fortune by the forelock. Du Bellay seems unable, as we would say nowadays, to ‘control the narrative’ that frames the Truce. For, set against past defeats, the Truce has offered another instance of the French showing their fickleness or ‘lighteness’ in international affairs: ‘Foreigners are saying more than ever that we are light / And that we are not able to seize Fortune’. This last bitter assertion evokes a cliché, first expressed by Julius Caesar, that the Gauls, and hence the French, are lightweights

('légers') when it comes to international affairs and military prowess.[16] Du Bellay rejects this notion throughout his work. Now, because of the Truce, the old anxiety about French character is back again, like the return of the repressed. It has been brought back by what should be the good news of the Truce and it ruins what should otherwise be a moment of triumph. Not only are the French taken to be light by the Spanish, but now, because of the Truce, this is happening more than ever ('*plus que jamais*', my emphasis).

Thus, the poem registers the ambiguity of the truce as a tension between its practical effects and its ideological meaning. It is good for the French, but bad for the reputation of the French. The ambiguous virtue of the monarch in peacemaking – suggested already in the opening of Du Bellay's 'Discours', where the king is not a hunter, but a lioness – is here nationalized. The first line of each stanza builds on a negative of the verb 'fascher', meaning to be angry or upset. Through the unfolding of the poem across these lines, which echo each other, we learn that what is good is not good. You can act prudently in war, but you may be imprudent in the propaganda war with your enemies. At this level, the poem is about the relationship between events and their afterlives.

Even more interesting is that the abruptness of the event, its surprising appearance, provokes a kind of displacement within Du Bellay's own writing. For this is one of the rare moments in the *Regrets* at which Du Bellay speaks of himself and his French colleagues from the outside, from the perspective of the Other. Most of the energy in the *Regrets* is spent in attacking the foolishness of the Romans. But now Du Bellay sees the French through the eyes of the non-French, 'they are saying more than ever that we are lightweights'. We move from the perspective of the French, through the perspective of the 'allies' (principally Florentine exiles, the so-called 'furoisciti'), who feel betrayed, to the viewpoint of the Romans. This turns Du Bellay and his fellow Frenchmen into objects of scorn. The event of the truce generates a kind of disruption within Du Bellay's own poetic discourse. Eisikovits's notion that the Truce is the moment at which the Other is acknowledged is turned inside out, and the poet finds himself mocked by his fellows.

The following sonnet in the sequence builds on this crisis in representation and authority. It recounts in topical detail what the gossips are saying. We learn that those banished from Florence who had been allied with the French (the so-called 'fuorisciti', whom Du Bellay calls 'ces bannis de Florence') say that the French king will now never rule Italy. The Pope, for his part, will never trust French declarations of any kind. The pause will give the Spanish the chance to recharge their forces and to team up with the English. In his

[16] On the topos of lightness, see Timothy Hampton, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), Introduction.

poem Du Bellay reports, literally, the language of those who criticize the French. This gives him the chance to set himself on both sides of the question of the truce. In sonnet 123, he seems to celebrate it. In 124, he warns about its consequences. And he ends the second sonnet by turning to his friend 'Vineus', or Girolamo della Rovere, Henry II's envoy, saying 'What shall we answer them' ('Que leur répondrons-nous?'). Thus, the presence of the voice of the gossips seems to be a kind of challenge to Du Bellay's own authority to 'speak' for the French. How can the author of the famous 'Defense' of the French language defend the actions of his king?

These first two sonnets thus mark a kind of break in the surface of the collection, a rupture in the process through which Du Bellay unpacks the corruption of Rome. The suddenness of the Truce of Vaucelles leads Du Bellay to view himself from the outside, and to risk falling silent in his defense of the French. Yet even more surprising is the third of these sonnets. For in sonnet 125, Du Bellay shifts discursive registers. He abandons political gossip and turns to a cosmic allegory that cites the description of the separation of the elements at the opening of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> Dedans le ventre obscur, où jadis fut enclos
> Tout cela qui depuis a rempli ce grand vide,
> L'air, la terre, et le feu, et l'élément liquide
> Et tout cela qu'Atlas soutient dessus son dos...
> N'avait encore ouvert la porte du chaos.
>
> [In the dark belly, where in olden times was enclosed
> Everything which, since, has filled up the great void [of the universe]
> Air, earth, fire, and the liquid element
> And everything that Atlas holds on his back...
> Had not yet opened the door of chaos][17]

Du Bellay notes that the diverse elements making up the universe at the beginning of time have been kept in chaos by war. War had placed a lock on the belly of the earth, says Du Bellay, until the new Truce unlocked it and let love and peace emerge. The Truce, he says, is the 'messenger of peace' ('de la paix, messagère'), a phrase, as we saw, that Du Bellay uses as well in his 'Discours' to the king. There it referred to Charles V's willingness to accept the Truce. Here it has cosmic importance.

[17] See Jolliffe's edition of the *Regrets*, p. 199, for these citations of Ovid.

What is striking is Du Bellay's turn to this language of cosmic, elemental change. The other poems in the collection involve the ironic contrast between pretense and reality, or the poet's complaints about his own humiliations and worries. Toward the end of the collection, he turns to a praise of his patrons in France. However, this is the *only* poem in the entire collection, out of one hundred and ninety-one sonnets, at which Du Bellay writes in this cosmic register, evoking the elements and the harmony of the universe. And, of course, it runs directly counter to his claim, in the very first sonnet, cited above, that his goal is *not* to offer grand allegories about the cosmos. *Yet here he does just that*. Thus, this poem, his attempt to make sense of the Truce of Vaucelles, runs counter to the tone and themes of the entire rest of the collection. It is a moment of poetic disruption, a kind of a tear in the fabric of the story. The confusion surrounding the Truce of Vaucelles, in other words, drives Du Bellay away from his stated objective in the *Regrets*, imposing on him a quite different register of poetic voice. It drives him into a discourse more conventional to odic or celebratory writing on peacemaking. It is almost as if this sonnet must repair the damage depicted in the two poems that precede it by turning away from the satirical register of the rest of the *Regrets*. The allegory removes the question of the truce from topical politics. No longer a question of Spaniards and Frenchmen, the Truce is now seen to be a force in the harmony of the elements, as abstract forces intertwine to bring the world to an age of happiness. The Truce is a 'messenger', that is, an ambassador. Thus, we are offered a kind of allegory of diplomatic peacemaking as cosmic harmony that counteracts the uneasy gossip of the preceding sonnet.

If these poems seem to grope for a register of language in which to frame the Truce of Vaucelles, Du Bellay brings the Truce back into the satirical regime that characterizes the *Regrets* in the last sonnet in this sequence. In Sonnet 126, he addresses the Truce directly, through an apostrophe, 'Tu sois la bienvenue, ô bienheureuse trêve' ['Welcome, O happy Truce']. The echo between 'bienvenue' and 'bienheureuse', welcome and happy, underscores the move in the stanza from past gossip to future possibilities. Every Christian should pray for this truce to succeed, he claims, for it alone can make us forget our past suffering: 'Puisque seule tu as la vertu d'enchanter / De nos travaux passés la souvenance grève' ['Because you alone have the power to enchant / Our harsh memories of past travails']. The rhyme between 'trêve' (truce) and 'grève' (harsh) suggests the movement of events. Moreover, the unusual verb 'enchanter' repeats a word Du Bellay frequently uses to describe what poetry can do.
And so he says in the dedication of the collection, to Jean d'Avanson, of poetry, that

> Elle éblouit les yeux de la pensée
> Pour quelquefois ne voir notre malheur,
> Et d'un doux charme enchante la douleur

Dont nuit et jour notre âme est offensée.

[She amazes the eyes of thought
So that for a moment we no longer see our unhappiness,
And with a sweet charm, she enchants the pain
By which our soul is tormented night and day].[18]

The Truce, like the poem, offers a break in the misery of life, a force of enchantment. As Sonnet 126 unfolds we are leaving the past behind. The voices of the mocking contemporaries are silenced as Du Bellay turns toward some possible future that will justify the moment of the present – proving the gossips wrong.

Du Bellay goes on to acknowledge both the possibilities and risks of the truce. If it holds for five years, it will have given birth to a 'not brief peace' ('une paix qui ne sera si brève'); and we note now that 'trêve' (truce) rhymes with 'brève' (brief), which is evoked to be negated. However, he notes there will be disadvantages. It may turn out, he asserts, that the courtly favorite ('le favori') will use this peace to accuse innocents and steal their land. It may also be that greedy lawyers ('l'avare avocat') will come and steal from the people who have suffered so much. If that is the case, says Du Bellay, let the peace go away and let us return to war. This last formulation is noteworthy. For it echoes the attacks on the truce that were issued by the enemies of France in the first of these sonnets. Now, however, Du Bellay has absorbed that rhetoric of attack into his own discourse and turned it back against the accusers. The unfolding of the sequence of four sonnets leads to a dialectical poetics through which Du Bellay absorbs the attacks of his enemies and recasts them by turning toward the future.

My point here is that the suddenness and ambiguity of the Truce of Vaucelles dovetails with Du Bellay's expressed desire in the *Regrets* to use his poems as a kind of daily record, commenting on the moods and circumstances of the poet. It is sudden; his poetry is occasional and flexible. Yet Du Bellay's need to position himself in the suddenly shifting sands of current events undermines the expressed design of his collection. His satires on the Roman court are turned back against him, when French political actions turn him into the object of derision in the eyes of his colleagues in Rome. His claim to speak for an honest or 'franc' French goodness (repeated throughout the collection) is placed in question when he is called on to defend his 'traitorous' king and can find nothing to say ('Que leur répondrons-nous?'). And his very description of the project of his work, as a kind of humble account of daily life, is disrupted when he leaps into the language of

[18] *Regrets*, p. 63.

cosmic allegory to praise a peace that no one seems quite to believe in. In the last of the Vaucelles sonnets, he seems to internalize the complaints against the French, lamenting that ‘private’ interests may simply undo the Truce altogether.

Conclusion

Throughout this sequence of poems, Du Bellay uses the form of the sonnet, and the resources of the sonnet sequence, to respond to the suddenness and disruption brought about by the Truce. The form of the poem helps shape the conceptualization of political action, which in turn frames the reception of the Truce. In contrast to the high triumphant style of the long-form ‘Discourse’ written in praise of the king, the compactness of the sonnet enables Du Bellay to make intensifying arguments, through a rhetorical *amplificatio*, as he moves from stanza to stanza. At the same time, the brevity of each stanza makes it possible for him quickly to turn back on what he has just said, to overturn earlier claims or send us in different directions. At a broader level, the shape of the sonnet sequence, in which the spaces between poems punctuate shifts in focus, allows Du Bellay to set different positions and attitudes in juxtaposition, to praise and blame at the same time, to move from local complaint to cosmic allegory. The sonnets suggest that the Truce is a deeply ambiguous and problematic event. It is so disruptive that every good thing it brings is matched by a bad thing. Gossip gives way to cosmic allegory. And yet it is in the realm of lyric poetry that such ambiguity can best be expressed and explored. Only through a variety of voices can the disruptive nature of the Truce be addressed and put into some type of larger context. Du Bellay uses a variety of poetic registers, approaching the event from different angles as he goes. Each of the generic frames that he mobilizes offers a different way of thinking about the moment of the Truce. We could certainly find expanded examples of each of these approaches in the literature of the European Renaissance. But what is striking about Du Bellay’s version is that it offers a kind of condensed version of a whole variety of frames in four brief sonnets; the discontinuity of the sonnet sequence makes possible precisely the rapid shifts in direction and language that he deploys.

It is interesting that Du Bellay should express such ambivalence about the Truce of Vaucelles. For, as noted earlier, the French generally saw Vaucelles as a major triumph. Anne de Montmorency, the diplomat chiefly responsible for the truce wrote to Coligny, ‘It is an act of God who loves our king and wanted to give him all the advantage and honor of this negotiation and beat back the greatness of his enemy’. And the king Henry II himself wrote to the Parlement on the 8th of February, 1556 that this is an agreement

bringing ‘no small honor and reputation’.[19] For their part, the Hapsburgs were more modest in their response, simply noting that the French would have preferred a longer truce had they gotten their way.

The Truce certainly has consequences for Du Bellay. For after these sonnets, the entire direction of the *Regrets* shifts, as Du Bellay is dispatched back to France, and his Roman misery ends. The Truce breaks the continuity of Du Bellay's career, as well as his poem. It is the most disuptive of events, and the most fragile, as it only lasted a few months. Indeed, the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, which followed Vaucelles by several years and was prepared by it, was referred to as ‘Une paix pour l'éternité’ (*an eternal peace*). No such title was applied to the Truce of Vaucelles, which, as Du Bellay seems to grasp, was almost useless from the moment of its completion. Thus, the ambivalence that hovers around the Truce must surely be linked to its openness and its tentative nature. On the one hand, it is the perfect political event for a text like Du Bellay's *Regrets*, which prides itself on its flexibility and openness. It is a diplomatic triumph for a diplomatic poet. But it is also the event that, by virtue of its ambiguity, upends the poet's ambition to write only of daily events and quotidian satire. The Truce challenges Du Bellay's focus on daily life, pushing him to write in different registers. It both disrupts the direction of his poetic collection and inspires him to mobilize the resources of poetic form.

[19] Here, again, I rely on Haan's excellent account of the context of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in *Une Paix Pour L'Eternité*, p. 49.