“OFFICIOUS MEN OF STATE”: EARLY MODERN DRAMA AND EARLY ENGLISH BUREAUCRATIC IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates representations of bureaucracy in early modern drama and culture. Focusing on a group of plays that feature bureaucratic figures among their characters, and reading those plays in the context of contemporary discussions of administration, this project attempts to understand the role played by the increasingly bureaucratic state in developing conceptions of individual subjectivity. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to show that bureaucratic administrative structures and the methods deployed to maintain them provide a conceptual space in which early modern writers could conceive of themselves as possessing a private, inscrutable interiority.

Chapter Two argues that whereas the binary relationship of secretary and master is often characterized in contemporary accounts as intensely, and problematically, intimate, the multivalent bureaucratic relationship is characterized, for the most part, as impersonal. Chapter Three links bureaucratic labour with one product of that labour, the bureaucratic document, in order to analyze the way in which early modern representations and discussions of bureaucratic documents constitute a medium through which a form of bureaucratic identity is conceptualized. Chapter Four examines a problem inherent to the bureaucratic delegation of authority – the combination of a desire to see everything and an inability to trust in the observations of others to aid you in fulfilling that desire – and seeks to find a solution to that problem in the way in which Much Ado About Nothing presents a vision of a disciplinary surveillance that is diffused throughout society, rather than residing in one privileged figure. Chapter Five shifts the focus of inquiry from the bureaucracy and those in its employ to the subject of bureaucratic authority. The chapter reads Hamlet’s claims to inscrutable interiority in the
context of the state’s desire to see, and document, its subjects. In it, I argue that, rather than deflecting questions, Hamlet’s assertions serve to align him with other targets of disciplinary surveillance. The dissertation ends by considering links between the representational crisis engendered by the growth of the early modern bureaucracy and the representational practices of the early modern theatre.
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After working for a number of years on bureaucratic structures and the meanings implied therein, I cannot help but be acutely aware of the insufficiency of my name standing alone on the title page of this dissertation. This project has, from its inception, benefited from the attention and input of a far greater number of people than I can begin to gesture at in the space of an acknowledgments page.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The fifth act, entirely an anticlimax, is taken up by the bloodbath Gennaro visits on the court of Squamuglia. Every mode of violent death available to Renaissance man, including a lye pit, land mines, a trained falcon with envenom’d talons, is employed. It plays, as Metzger remarked later, like a Road runner cartoon in blank verse. At the end of it about the only character left alive in a stage dense with corpses is the colorless administrator, Gennaro.

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*¹

*The Courier’s Tragedy*, the fictional play that the epigraph describes, is a send-up by Pynchon of the excesses and idiosyncrasies of Jacobean revenge tragedy, replete with incest, betrayal, multiple poisonings, a nefarious Catholic priest, decade-long infiltrations of the enemy’s court, and an heir to the throne whose untimely death results in his narrowly missing the chance to reclaim his stolen birthright. At the centre of this gleeful mayhem stands Gennaro: unremarkable, unaffiliated. The “winner” (58) of the play is not a member of any of the groups doing battle; he is, instead, a bureaucrat, performing the task assigned to him.

Pynchon’s use of the adjective “colorless” to describe Gennaro is literally a reference to the drab gray costume he wears. It also registers figuratively, as a means of differentiating Gennaro from the parties in conflict in the play. Gennaro is a placeholder, unaffiliated with any of the factions vying for control on Pynchon’s imagined stage. As such, he is “colorless” in that, while others fight for various leaders under various standards, his interest is simply in maintaining the status quo until the rightful ruler is restored. Finally, “colorless” denotes pallor. Gennaro is, the term seems to insinuate, 

bloodless, less a person than a function personified. He is, as the narrator notes when Gennaro first appears on the stage, “a complete nonentity” (53).

The identification, however satiric, by Pynchon of the interest demonstrated by early modern drama in the role of the bureaucrat in society is somewhat surprising. There is, in fact, a relative paucity of main characters in early modern plays who are obviously connected with the bureaucratic functioning of the state. This is not to say, however, that Pynchon’s decision to create a Renaissance play in which a bureaucrat functions centrally is not an insightful one. Indeed, it is the central argument of this dissertation that the workings and organization of the state bureaucracy in early modern England played a significant role in shaping the everyday lives of those under its authority. Furthermore, the way in which the play characterizes Gennaro – as disconnected from the society around him, as representing a selfhood entirely determined by his employment – touches on issues central to late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century dramatic representations of bureaucrats and bureaucracy.

The Courier’s Tragedy presents, for the first four acts, an aristocratic world characterized by intensely personal invocations of revenge and honour, which are effected and defended, respectively, through unmistakably personal forms of violence. The fifth act, however, dramatizes a shift away from these modes of social domination, offering a glimpse of a future in which they are sublimated into the apparatus of the centralizing administrative state of which Gennaro is a representative. Gennaro represents the way in which, in the modern state, violence becomes the sole purview of the government. Inforegrounding the role of such a character, Pynchon’s description of the play neatly encapsulates the diachronic nature of Renaissance drama. Presenting a
world of aristocratic violence and betrayal only to dramatize its downfall, *The Courier’s Tragedy* stages an historical process, the passing of a way of existence that is not so much conquered as it is superseded.

This dissertation investigates connections between these two related concerns, identity and governance, in early modern English drama. Specifically, it argues that the increasingly bureaucratic nature of governance of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England makes available a representational vocabulary with which dramatists such as William Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd, and Ben Jonson examine the nature of individual identity. That is, bureaucratic administrative structures and the methods deployed to maintain them provide a conceptual framework in which early modern playwrights explore the subjectivity both of those in the employ of the state and those under their authority.

I

To speak of “the state” in early modern England is to engage in a decades-long debate. Over the last few years, a number of historians have begun to challenge prevailing historiographies of the state under the Tudors and the Stuarts. Traditionally, as Michael Braddick argues in *State Formation in Early Modern England 1550-1700* (2000), “Where political historians of the period before 1640 have made reference to the state it has generally been as an explanation for political dysfunction: structural failure and incapacity are the most prominent features of the state in the work of Russell,

\[2\] This is perhaps due to the nature of the rule of the Tudors, the structure of which, Penry Williams argues, makes it “exceptionally difficult to analyse” (409).
Morrill, and others” (2-3).\(^3\) The last decade has witnessed the emergence of a new movement among political historians towards recognizing a specifically early modern incarnation of the state. These historians, including Braddick, Steve Hindle, Susan Bridgen, and Philip Edwards, align themselves with social historians, whose local accounts of life under the Tudors and Stuarts refer on a regular basis to the role of the state in everyday life.\(^4\) In doing so, they draw attention to the way in which constitutional histories of statehood, in concentrating on theoretical debates about the nature and limitation of political power, tend to overlook practical instantiations of the state at the local level. Furthermore, these histories of the state underscore the importance of the intervention of the state in the villages and the shires in terms of the formation and legitimation of the English state as a whole.

These recent historians of the early modern English state tend, in order to explain or to justify their own characterization of early modern England as constituting a “state” in the modern sense of the word, to follow one of two lines of argument. The first is to draw attention to the way in which modern conceptions of statehood make their way into political discourse over the course of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

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Some, like Edwards, argue that this nascent sense of the state as such appears obliquely, in the use of terms such as “empire” in royal proclamations and acts of parliament (116). Others note the way in which uses of the word “state” itself change. John Guy writes,

> It is striking that, whereas in 1500 the word ‘state’ had possessed no political meaning in English beyond the ‘state or condition’ of the prince or the kingdom, by the second half of Elizabeth’s reign it was used to signify the ‘state’ in the modern sense. In the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII politicians had spoken only of ‘country’, ‘people’, ‘kingdom’, and ‘realm’, but by the 1590s they began to conceptualize the ‘state’. (Guy 1988, 352)

According to Hindle, this new manifestation comes somewhat belatedly to political discourse, as “the term ‘state’ in the abstract and recognisably modern sense of an impersonal constitutional order was undoubtedly current in humanist circles by the middle of the sixteenth century” (17). In practice, too, governance was shifting towards something more recognizably modern; Braddick argues, “Emerging contemporary practice defined the state as the ‘omnipotent yet impersonal power’ within a particular territory” (48).

This last quotation gestures towards the other line of argument used by proponents of early modern statehood: a turn to Max Weber’s seminal definition of the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (78). This jurisdictional monopoly over the use of violence, according to historians of early modern governance, had been effectively accomplished by the reign of Elizabeth I. Penry Williams states, “By the reign of Elizabeth the development of lieutenancies, trained bands, and county militias had rendered the Crown less dependent upon noble retainers and the state had come nearer to effective control of physical force” (436). More important, perhaps, for the purposes of
this dissertation is Williams’s linking of the end, by the mid-sixteenth century, of “the forceful and violent domination of whole regions by great magnates” to “the marked increase in litigation during the second half of the sixteenth century. In the first year of Elizabeth’s reign there were brought to the Star Chamber sixty-seven cases, in the last year 732” (238). Thus, extra-governmental violence was not only suppressed by force, it was also sublimated into other, rapidly growing, state-controlled avenues of (often violent) conflict resolution.

However, historians have been careful to draw attention to the way in which the state cannot simply be understood as a collection of institutions. Michael Mann modifies Weber’s definition somewhat, characterizing the state as “a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outward to cover a territorially demarcated area, over which it claims a monopoly of permanent rule-making, backed up by physical violence” (qtd in Hindle 19). In this manner, as Hindle notes, the state ceases to be at its foundation a collection of institutions, and becomes instead “a set of power relations which become institutionalised to a greater or lesser extent over time” (19). Hindle’s recapitulation of Mann’s point, however, elides an important, and, for historians who argue that early modern English government constituted a recognizably modern form of statehood, problematic detail; the state is, according to both Weber and Mann, differentiated. One difficulty in assessing the degree to which the early modern state can be considered “differentiated” is a certain flexibility in various historians’ definitions of just what “differentiation” in Weber is meant to denote. Williams, for instance, concentrates on the degree to which early modern institutions of government are differentiated from each other in jurisdictional
terms. Mapping out the relationships between the various writing offices of the crown (Fig. 1), Williams demonstrates the way in which, by the turn of the fifteenth century, offices of state were beginning to exert jurisdictional authority over specific decision-making processes. Similarly, Philip Edwards records the shift, in sixteenth-century England, of direct control away from the crown, noting that “there were by 1542 six discrete revenue courts no longer dependent on the close involvement of the king” (118) and that “In finance the royal chamber [...] began [in 1536] to lose its supremacy with the creation of the first of a number of new ‘bureaucratic’ revenue courts, each with its own central staff, records and seals, and its agents in the localities” (118). Thus, by the middle of the sixteenth century, English institutions of government were laying claim to specific areas of jurisdiction and expertise and, in doing so, were establishing the very sort of internal institutional differentiation that Weber argues is fundamental to statehood.

The other way in which historians of the early modern state interpret the word “differentiate” is as signifying the way in which the authority of agents of the state is discrete from whatever authority those agents may wield as a result of social status. That is, the authority of the state and its agents is self-sufficient. The state bestows authority; it does not borrow it from those in its employ. This impersonality is, for Weber and those who follow him, a key component of statehood. As John Brewer writes, the state is “a territorially and jurisdictionally defined political entity in which public authority is
distinguished from (though not unconnected to) private power, and which is manned by officials whose primary (though not sole) allegiance is to a set of political institutions under a single, i.e. sovereign and final, authority” (252 n. 1). As Braddick notes, this was not entirely the case in Tudor England:

the distinction between public and private authority was very blurred. Analytically, the authority of a magistrate was distinct from the authority of a substantial local gentleman, but in practice the former depended on the latter. Fitness for office was appraised not simply in administrative but also in social terms. In both senses, measured against the Weberian ideal-type of the modern state, this state was only partially differentiated.

(35)

“Private authority” for Braddick is meant to encapsulate forms of power which are not directly bestowed by the state, such as wealth, land, and title. Braddick’s somewhat misleading use of the word “private” draws attention to a problem inherent in attempts to distinguish between state and social authority in early modern England. Discussions of the degree of differentiation of the state are predicated on an understanding of its subjects as recognizing that differentiation as an ontological possibility. However, the assumption of the existence of a stable distinction, which is to say one that is capable of being reliably deployed institutionally, between public and private identities, between state and personal allegiances, is not such a simple one to make.

II

Timothy Reiss, in *Mirages of the Selfe* (2003), traces modern conceptions of personhood, or “whoness,” as he calls it, through their sources in antiquity and the Middle Ages. In his book, Reiss stresses the undeniable and immense influence of antiquity while maintaining that “Many years’ work on the European seventeenth and earlier centuries had convinced me that this sense [of personhood] and its matching
experiences differed radically from those dominant in the modern West, and that between
the waning of the European sixteenth century and that of the seventeenth some (non-
monolithic) change solidified” (1).

The parenthetical insertion of “non-monolithic” gestures towards problems with
accounts of the emergence of modern subjectivity that have been written since the 1980s.
As David Aers argues, in locating the birth of modern “bourgeois subjectivity” in the
seventeenth century, the Cultural Materialist and New Historicist re-formulations of early
modern subjectivity fail to take into account medieval devotional writings. Drawing on
the work of Charles Taylor, Aers argues that religious writers such as St. Augustine
demonstrate a sense of inwardness that Taylor describes, in Sources of the Self (1989), as
one of the hallmarks of modern subjectivity. Though critics since have acknowledged
this problematic “ahistorical othering of the medieval period,” they have also identified
problems with the way in which “Aers and Patterson overstate the case by privileging
articulations from a single discourse, theology, over all others” (Traub et al 1-2).

While Aers’s argument may be somewhat too dependent on religious formulations of
identity, some medievalists have begun turning towards the nature of early English
governance as a potential context in which writers begin to conceive of themselves as
self-constituted subjects. Ethan Knapp writes, in The Bureaucratic Muse (2001), of the
role played by bureaucratic labour in the development of an interiorized sense of self. He
argues, of the writings of the medieval bureaucrat-poet Thomas Hoccleve, that “It is the
imperative to rid the bureaucratic text of subjectivity itself that makes subjectivity into a

5 Though this is an understandable criticism of Aers’s essay, the inclusion of
Patterson is difficult to understand, given that Patterson’s concern in his essay is not
religion, but economics.
recognizable and separable literary topos” (13). That is, the desire to exclude idiosyncratic aspects of identity from bureaucratic writing necessarily assumes the existence, indeed creates, according to Knapp, an individual identity which is not and cannot be expressed in terms of one’s allegiances or social position.

In *The Subject Medieval/Modern* (2004), Peter Haidu is even more forceful in his assessment of connections between bureaucracy and subjectivity, claiming that, “Sheriffs in England and provosts and bailiffs in France played key roles in bringing power to bear on polities too large or distant to remain directly under the ruler’s eyes. These representatives of a centralizing, absent power were subjectivized first: the general population came much later” (180). Haidu’s book traces the roots of modern identity through the concurrent and interconnected development of the state and literacy in medieval England. Haidu locates the wellspring of these movements in the *Domesday Book* (1086) and the *Magna Carta* (1215) which “mark their epochs and frame the growth of the nation, the medieval initiation of the state itself, which will cover the face of the earth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Literacy, numeracy, and the earliest forms of state organization see the day together” (184). Haidu’s argument that modern subjectivity is linked to state formation derives from his claim that “Subjects are those who bear the necessity of representing an absent instance outside themselves” (116), which is to say that subjectivity is, at its root, an act of representation. Haidu’s formulation of the subject imagines a process of externalizing the signs of “an absent instance” of authority, of, in the case of state agents, the “centralizing, absent power” mentioned above. The exteriority of the signs invokes, as its logical corollary, an interiority of the self and thus, in constructing the relationship between represented
authority and self as an inside/outside binary, Haidu proposes a bifurcation of identity that is reminiscent of Knapp’s characterization of the production of bureaucratic documents.

In this way, Knapp’s argument about the depersonalization of bureaucratic text is also significant in relation to the government employee who creates that text. The link that Haidu posits between necessarily mediated government administration – what Haidu calls “representational governance” – and subjectivity is a troubling one for those in power. While the ideal bureaucracy of Haidu’s formulation requires that the government’s representatives, like Knapp’s bureaucratic documents, be void of individual subjectivity, the very processes of representation, Haidu argues, foster precisely the opposite. This paradox surfaces repeatedly as a concern for administrators in early modern England. As John Guy notes, critics of Henry VIII “complained that [he] was surrounded by ‘flatterers’ of base birth and vicious reputation who subverted the church and pillaged the realm for their own ‘private’ advantage” (297). Hindle connects this problem with the problem of differentiation, arguing that, “The delegation of public authority to those who had a material interest in its exercise created inherent difficulties – theoretical as well as practical – in separating what was good and beneficial to the subject in general from what was profitable and convenient to the office-holder: what constituted the ‘public realm’ was by no mean clear or certain” (22). Though it is difficult to imagine a member of society who has no material interest in the exercise of public authority, Hindle’s larger point is significant. As Hindle’s and Guy’s arguments indicate, what seems to have especially been a concern is a shift in power away from traditional,
which is to say aristocratic and ecclesiastical, interests towards the new figure of the professional “office-holder.”

III

The sixteenth century was a particularly auspicious time for the emergence of the office-holder as a powerful figure within society. As Penry Williams observes, “The celebrated infertility of the Tudors led to serious problems for the succession to the throne. But it avoided that plague of royal uncles, brothers, and cousins which was so disruptive a feature of contemporary French politics under the Valois and Bourbons” (431). It was not only the Tudors themselves who saw their numbers diminish over the century, as “By the end of the sixteenth century political error, plain stupidity, and biological error had destroyed many of those great families which had dominated English life at the beginning of the Tudor period” (Williams 432). The decline of the aristocracy created an opportunity for commoners to ascend to roles of influence; the growing administrative apparatus of the state provided them with an avenue by which to seek advancement. Indeed, throughout most of the sixteenth century, administration remained the purview of commoners, and “until Robert Cecil went to the [House of] Lords in 1604, the [Principal] Secretary [of State] was invariably a commoner” (Williams 44).

Chapter Two, “The Rise of the Bureaucrat,” opens with a discussion of the way in which the growth of the administrative state resulted, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, in an influx of commoners into positions of power. As Williams claims, “the demands being made by government upon the administration of the shires called for an élite different in its capacities from the old regional aristocracy. The Crown sought to train such an élite and to insert it into the crucial areas of power” (440). Over
the last couple of decades, literary critics have associated this class of literate, elite labourer with the figure of the personal secretary. This association is logical and the fact that the monarch’s counsellor continued to bear the title of “Secretary” would seem to indicate a lineage between the personal relationship of master and secretary and the institutional relationship of sovereign and Secretary.

However, whereas Jonathan Goldberg and Richard Rambuss have pointed out, in *Writing Matter* (1990) and *Spenser’s Secret Career* (1993), respectively, that the binary relationship of secretary and master is often characterized in contemporary accounts as intensely and problematically intimate, the multivalent bureaucratic relationship is characterized for the most part as impersonal. Following the aforementioned account of the growth of the administrative state apparatus in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the chapter takes issue with Alan Stewart’s dismissal of readings, such as Rambuss’s, of the homoerotic dynamics of the early modern secretarial closet. In order to do so, the chapter traces representations of erotic male-male (and one unwitting female-female) relationships that arise in contexts which are linked to the secretarial relationship. However, the chapter ends by drawing attention to the way in which dramatic representations deploy the figure of eroticized secretarial closeness only to subvert it. Juxtaposing the representation of state service in Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* with contemporary accounts of the nature of administrative and secretarial labour, I argue that the threat of the close secretarial relationship is diffused, and thus weakened, in an increasingly bureaucratic system whose agents are notable, in part, for their interchangeability.
Chapter Three traces the increasing depersonalization of secretarial labour as it is reconstituted within a bureaucratic context. Linking bureaucratic labour with one product of that labour, the document, the chapter analyzes the way in which early modern representations and discussions of bureaucratic documents constitute a medium through which a form of bureaucratic identity is conceptualized. As it appears in works such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601), the bureaucratic document is constructed, I argue, as an analogue to emergent models of self-constituted interiority. However, though this configuration appears in a number of forms, it remains, ultimately, elusive, as the relationship in which it is conceived remains, as in Chapter Two, inimical to inscriptions of individual subjectivity.

My use of the term “bureaucracy” here and throughout the dissertation is admittedly anachronistic. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term does not appear in print until the first half of the nineteenth century. My use of the term is informed by the sociological theories of Weber, who describes the following characteristics as fundamental to bureaucratic structures of authority:

I. There is the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is, by laws or administrative regulations […]

II. The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a […] system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones. […]
III. The management of the [...] office is based upon written documents.

(196-197)

Although these characteristics fail to encompass fully the broad jurisdictional range of state offices at the turn of the seventeenth century, they nonetheless offer a useful framework in which to imagine early modern administrative structures.

Unfortunately, the vocabulary of early modern England is, perhaps tellingly, inadequate to encompass the range of social positions and structures that fall under the umbrella term “bureaucrat.” Terms such as “clerk” and “secretary,” while evoking the state’s increasing dependence on and constitution through the circulation of documents, fail to denote the extended hierarchy that is crucial both to my argument and to the organization of early modern authority. Though it addresses this concern somewhat, Pynchon’s term “administrator” – again something of an anachronism – seems to me inadequate when applied to the sometimes very physical work of historical figures such as Richard Topcliffe. One distinctive feature of the early modern bureaucracy in England is the way in which the bureaucratic state continued to trade in the forms of state violence that it would eventually come to replace, a point that will be discussed further in Chapter Four. Thus, though the work of Robert Beale as a clerk of Principal Secretary of State Francis Walsingham falls neatly within the scope of modern conceptions of bureaucratic labour, his work as an interrogator and torturer does not. Nevertheless, he performed each of these offices as a member of Walsingham’s staff. To differentiate between the two, declaring one bureaucratic and one not, is to assert an anachronistic model of administration.

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6 For accounts of the careers of Topcliffe and Beale, see the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, volumes 55 and 4, respectively.
However, the appropriateness of applying the term “bureaucracy” to English forms of governance under the Tudors and the early Stuarts has generated decades of scholarly controversy. From the publication, in 1953, of G. R. Elton’s *The Tudor Revolution in Government*, scholars have debated when and if early modern governance changed from household rule to bureaucracy. Elton posits the reign of Henry VIII as the time during which England fundamentally, and irrevocably, became a bureaucratic state. While a number of critics have questioned the validity of Elton’s claims, it is significant for the purposes of this dissertation that the vast majority of these objections revise his findings by putting forward an earlier date for the change, not a later one.

This movement towards bureaucratization depends on a combination of factors. First, as the above discussion of early modern state formation indicated, the period witnessed a shift in the balance of power between the crown and territorial magnates: “Before, during, and after the sixteenth century there was a complex balance of military and social forces; during the Tudor epoch it was shifting in favour of the Crown” (Williams 438). Coincidental with this development were the growth and codification of administrative practices, at both the centre and the periphery. The sheer size of the

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7 See Chapter Two, pages 31-35.
8 Williams describes the extent to which the writing offices of the crown already followed carefully delineated jurisdictional rules and procedures by the turn of the fifteenth century: “By 1400 a sophisticated machine had been assembled for the transmission, authentication, and execution of the decisions made in the upper echelons of government, and for conducting such recurrent and routine operations as the collection and payment of money. This machine resembled a set of assembly-lines along which orders passed through a series of check-points. The decisions made by King and Council were processed by three institutions—the Signet, the Privy Seal, and the Chancery—though not in every case by all three of them. The King had acquired, in the time of Richard II, an authenticating instrument, the Signet, which was under his own control and was wielded by his personal secretary. Signet and secretary could be used for sending relatively informal letters to the King’s subjects or for activating other parts of the
central administrative machinery meant that, by one estimation, “In London, perhaps one in ten of the adult male population held some office” (Braddick 36). Similarly, outside the centre, the incursion of central government into the affairs of the shires was increasingly apparent. As W. J. Jones notes, in Elizabethan England, “A man living in Chester, for example, would be aware that there was a lord lieutenant, a vice-admiral, a sheriff, and a commission of the peace. There would be musters, a county court, quarter and petty sessions. There were manorial and leet courts, constables, and royal foresters” (124). Though the presence of representatives of the crown was not new, the way in which that representation manifested itself was changing. The ad hoc commissions through which much of Tudor administration was managed were increasingly becoming executive machine: the Signet Office was the instrument most often used for disseminating the King’s personal commands. More formal was the Privy Seal office, where King or Council had their administrative orders drawn up in traditional and, if necessary, legal language, and authenticated by the older and more important Privy Seal. Essentially this was a writing-office, which could send instructions to royal officials or foreign courts and could authorize proceedings in the most formal parts of the machine, Chancery and Exchequer. Chancery was the oldest and most solemn part of the whole apparatus. It alone could authenticate documents with the Great Seal, which was in its custody, and issue orders that required full legal backing, such as grants of land, appointments to offices, and treaties with foreign powers. Although there were some routine matters, such as the issue of legal writs, where it could act on its own initiative, for any matter of permanent importance, it needed a warrant for its action from the Privy Seal or the Signet: usually only the former would be sufficient.” (Williams 40)

9 “The backbone of Elizabethan local government was the commission of the peace, and its individual members, the justices of the peace. Commissions of the peace tended to grow in both size and importance in this period. At the beginning of the Tudor period there were about ten justices per shire, by the middle of Elizabeth’s reign about forty or fifty and by the end of the sixteenth century commissions were larger still. […] In 1599, 306 statutes placed duties on the shoulders of the justices. Of these, 133 dated from before 1485, 60 from the period 1485-1547, 38 from the period 1547-58, and a further 75 from the period 1558-97” (Braddick 30-31). For a similar account of the growing responsibility of JPs in the shires, see Hindle 10.
permanent fixtures in the localities,¹⁰ and those people carrying out the crown’s work in the shires were coming to be, more often than not, permanent functionaries rather than informal, temporary representatives. This process of regularization culminated, B. W. Quintrell argues, with the publication of Charles I’s *Book of Orders* in 1631, which sought to fix “a whole range of officers from ministers of state to petty constables in an ambitiously far-reaching chain of command and accountability” (533). The enforcement of these sorts of regulations resulted in the general populace becoming more familiar, and more comfortable, with the apparatus of governance: “Monopolists, chartered companies, informers, tax farmers and hunters were all suspect in a way that officeholders were not” (Braddick 43). This differentiation between private agents of the crown and public ones is indicative of a new conception of what it means to be the bearer of the authority of the crown.

Furthermore, this shift seems to have been reciprocally beneficial to both the state and its agents. On the one hand, “Office not only reflected social status but also confirmed it, and this was a motive, sometimes perhaps the chief one, for seeking office” (Braddick 35).¹¹ On the other, “Bureaucratisation, enshrining precision, accuracy and

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¹⁰ Williams notes further the increase both in number and in scope of the commissions under Elizabeth: “Commissions for sewers had originally been appointed in the reign of Henry VI to maintain defences against flooding and to keep open inland waterways. Their authority was extended by a statute of 1532 and they became still more important towards the end of the century when projects were mooted for the drainage of the fens. The Elizabethan Privy Council set up commissions in 1580 for improving the breed of horses and in 1586 for the relief of imprisoned debtors. A statute of 1601 authorized the appointment of charity-commissioners in each county to supervise the administration of charitable bequests. Taken together, these commissions show the steady growth of state intervention in national life” (418).

¹¹ As evidence of the relative social status of government functionaries in the localities, Penry Williams quotes the following warning made by Francis Bacon to circuit judges in 1617: “My meaning is not that you should be imperious and strange to the
predictability, can be understood in terms of legitimation, as a means of rendering political authority acceptable. By reducing the discretion available to specialised state functionaries, and by specifying their rewards more closely, the emphasis on precision and regularity helped to secure more ready consent to their activities” (Braddick 43). Thus, through the conferral of authority onto its deputies, and through the careful limitation of that authority, the crown instituted a system whose intrusion into the lives of its subjects was made palatable, if not desirable, by comparison to its predecessor.

Fundamentally, for Weber, bureaucracy is characterized by the diffusion of authority from one figure – whom he styles as the “charismatic leader” (201) – to a multitude of functionaries, a diffusion that results in the extension of the reach of the state beyond the scope of the individual and into wide-reaching and diverse facets of society. It is, ultimately, this aspect of bureaucracy which guides my characterization of a number of widely disparate employments as “bureaucratic.” The figures characterized as such throughout this dissertation are all officers of the state, performing tasks on behalf of a central authority that is characterized by varying degrees of isolation.

IV

This understanding of bureaucracy in terms of the state’s incursion into everyday life, of its increasingly apparent ubiquity, is fundamental to the latter half of the dissertation. In Chapter Four, the focus shifts from the nature of bureaucratic identity to the problem of bureaucratic autonomy. The increasing distance from administrative gentlemen of the county. You are above them in power, but your rank is not much unequal” (411). Bacon concludes with a piece of advice: “and learn this, that power is ever of greatest strength when it is civilly carried” (411). His use of the phrase “civilly carried” is notable for the way in which it combines dignified impersonality with public service.
centre to periphery again raises the central problem of mediated systems of governance.
The complication of “representational governance,” Peter Haidu notes, is the potential instability of the individual representatives of the crown: “When the signs are human, a question always arises: to what degree does the agent represent his superior’s interest, to what extent does he betray it, through incompetence or in subverting his lord’s interest for the sake of his own?” (182). Thus, the extension of the crown’s reach into the everyday lives of its subjects, though legitimating through normalization, simultaneously underscores the contingency of royal power on those who execute it.

Standing as a representative figure of the related issues of the excessive presence of the bureaucracy and of overly self-directing employees of the state is Justice Adam Overdo of Jonson’s Bartholomew Fair. Overdo’s unwillingness to trust those working under him results in his making the catastrophic decision to undertake the observation and ferreting out of iniquity himself. The conjunction of these two concerns – that is, the desire to see everything and the inability to trust in the observations of others to aid you in fulfilling that desire – is manifest in two works by Shakespeare: Measure for Measure (1604) and Much Ado About Nothing (1599). It is the argument of the chapter that, while Measure for Measure presents, in the figure of the disguised Duke, a fantasy of panopticism, Much Ado About Nothing offers a more pragmatic vision of a properly functioning state structure, in which authority and the execution thereof depend not on one all-seeing figure, but rather on a multitude of differing and complementary viewpoints. It is my further argument that these representations of state authority offer a complication of the traditional Foucauldian paradigm of “The Spectacle of the Scaffold”
through such dramatic strategies as co-opting playgoers into the disciplinary schema of
the play.

The chapter’s attention to representations of investigation and judgment links,
implicitly, administration with justice. Reconfigurations of authority in the period result
in the connection between the administration of government and the administration of
justice being much stronger in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England than it is
today. As Martin Ingram notes, “Government […] was largely channeled through legal
forms, and as a result the boundaries between judicial and administrative action were far
less clearly drawn than is the case today” (27). Indeed, “Most institutions of government
were indeed to some degree or other courts of justice” (Williams 217). Braddick goes
further, arguing that, in early modern England, “Judicial and political authority were
closely intertwined” (37) to the extent that “law was an active arm of government” (36).
Thus the administration of justice should be understood, in the period, as an aspect of the
administration of government. “Justice legitimated political power at an overarching
level” (39), Braddick claims. In this way, processes of investigation and judgment such
as those portrayed in Bartholomew Fair, Measure for Measure, and Much Ado About
Nothing play an integral role in the establishment of a stable, and effective, governmental
presence throughout the realm. They do so, furthermore, in a way which is, as both
Ingram and Braddick argue, difficult to separate from the administration and deployment
of political authority.

Chapter Five shifts the focus of inquiry from the bureaucracy and those in its
employ to the subject of the bureaucratic state. Concentrating on strategies of resistance
to bureaucratic authority, I argue that the fundamentally textual nature of bureaucracy
provides those under its rule with a potential means by which to re-envision and re-constitute themselves. Returning to Hamlet, I examine the way in which Hamlet’s famous claim to have “that within which passeth show” (1.2.85) characterizes him, in the context of the bureaucratic state’s desire to see its subjects, as a resistant subject whose claims to inscrutable interiority, rather than deflecting questions, serve to align him with other targets of disciplinary surveillance. I argue further that Hamlet’s vision of the world as constituted by texts is a dystopic vision of the encroachment of bureaucracy into everyday life.

Earlier in this introduction, I argue that the problem with attempts by historians to characterize the government of early modern England as satisfying the Weberian criteria of statehood was the issue of differentiation. As David Harris Sacks puts it, the “union of public and private was precisely the problem of the state in Elizabethan England” (125). This is a problem with which the dramatic works being discussed throughout are intensely concerned, from the problem of the closeness of both Sejanus and Hieronimo to their respective rulers discussed in Chapter Two, to the inverse suspicion of the depersonalized nature of communication in an increasingly bureaucratic state that is the topic of discussion of Chapter Three, or the argument made, in the plays examined in Chapter Four, for the need to move from what Norbert Elias calls “subject-oriented” (250) observation to an investigative practice that is divorced from individual subjectivity. This move, I argue, is effected through the turn to the document as an externalized, objective authority.

The final chapter’s discussion of Hamlet investigates the way in which Hamlet reacts against connections forged between texts and identity, connections which the
previous chapters have argued draw deliberately on the example of the bureaucratic organization of authority in early modern England. In tracing this trajectory, the chapter seeks to demonstrate the way in which the focus on texts and textuality throughout this dissertation is not a critical conceit but rather the tracing of a contemporary concern. The works examined herein are explicit in their interest in connections between textuality and society, between documentation and selfhood. Olivia’s anti-erotic blazon of herself in *Twelfth Night*, Dogberry’s desire to be “writ down an ass” (*Much Ado* 4.2.77-78) and Hamlet’s denunciation as “sheep and cattle” (*Hamlet* 5.1.107) those who would understand the self as document all draw on a specific discourse of agency which arises through and in reaction to the expansion and increased visibility of the bureaucratic state in England in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Specifically, they are a reaction to the way in which the bureaucratic organization of the state “engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them” (Foucault 1995, 189).

Thus, the question of differentiation is one with which these plays are intensely concerned. The movement of public authority out of the hands of private citizens that was being effected in the period finds its corollary in an interest in representations of connections between private identity and public authority in the drama of the period. Ultimately, though, this project is not a history of bureaucracy in late-Tudor and early-Stuart England. The brief historical account presented here and in the next chapter exists in order to draw attention to the way in which the dramatic works discussed in the dissertation engage with a system of governance dependent on the very forms of representation in which the theatre trades.
As Katharine Eisaman Maus argues, “Theater involves [...] a deliberate, agreed-upon estrangement of fictional surface from ‘truth’: the plebeian actor concealing his identity under the language and manner of a king, the prepubescent boy donning Cleopatra’s sumptuous robes, friends from the repertory company butchering one another in a staged duel” (31). Maus’s three examples offer a representative sample of the way in which early modern theatrical representation engages in a renegotiation and a re-envisioning of social relations, of kingship, sexuality, and fellowship, respectively, in such a way that threatens to undermine conceptions of inherent, authentic identity.

Arguing for the revolutionary nature of this representational mode, Nora Johnson states that early modern theatre, specifically the work of Shakespeare, inverts this hierarchy of intrinsic and extrinsic identities, creating “a theatrical ‘I,’ a representation of a mode of selfhood that is made up of the very factors that would seem to militate against a sense of the self: theatrical role-playing, illicit desires that confuse gender categories, the perceived parasitism of the successful actor” (698). Johnson’s list could as easily be an account of complaints against the growing prominence of office-holders in Tudor and Stuart England.

The final criticism that she lists, the “perceived parasitism” of actors, is related to complaints, such as some of those levelled in Robert Greene’s famous *Groats-Worth of Witte* (1592). Along, and in conjunction, with his famous attack on “an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers” (34), Greene complains of “those Puppets […] that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours” (34). The parasitic relationship that Greene refers to in the passage can be more clearly understood when read in the
context of Francesco’s Fortunes, the second part of his Never too late (1590), in which he writes, of the decline of Roman theatre,


covetousnesse crept into the qualitie, and that meane men greedy of gaines did fal to practise the acting of such playes, and in the Theater presented their Comedies, but to such only as rewarded them wel for their pains: when thus Comedians grew to be mercinaries, then men of account left to practise such pastimes, and disdained to have their honors blemisht with the staine of such base and vile gaines: insomuch that both comedies and Tragedies grew to lesse account in Rome. (64)

Clearly, for Greene, the decline of the theatre is directly related to its movement into the commercial sphere. Interestingly, though, his objection is not to the fact of payment, as he notes, without complaint, that playwrights in Rome were paid “with rich rewards, according to the excellence of the Comedie” (64). Thus Greene’s objection is to the movement from a personal, patronage system to an impersonal, professional theatre. In this way, the ascendance of the professional theatre in London in the late-sixteenth century evoked precisely those concerns which lay at the heart of objections to the virtually simultaneous growth of bureaucratization in government. Standing-in, observation, role-playing, and professionalization – these are the stocks-in-trade of both early modern governance and early modern drama.

This is, in part, a study of subjectivity, but it is a study that is defined in terms of a specific set of relations. It is an analysis of a subject that finds itself (or perhaps seeks, unsuccessfully, to find its self) determined by the medium through which it is recorded. Simultaneously, though, running through the dissertation are a series of individual
moments in which characters in these works, in the face of what appears to be an overwhelming and all-encompassing system of authority, work, if only briefly, and not necessarily successfully, to assert the impossibility of their containment within an impersonal discursive structure. It is in these moments that the vacancy engendered by the forging of bureaucratic identity begins to be filled.
Chapter Two: The Rise of the Bureaucrat

Although his life were still ambitious, proud,
Yet is he at the highest now he is dead.

Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy

Thou durst not tell me so,
Hadst thou not Caesar’s warrant. I can see
Whose power condemns me.

Ben Jonson, Sejanus His Fall

The 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vacabondes is well known to scholars of early modern drama for its listing of traveling players among those classified as vagabonds, and for its consequent role in the development of the patronage of acting companies. Among those the act characterizes as vagabonds are:

al fencers, bearewardes, common players in enterludes, & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable personage of greater degree, al juglers, pedlers, tinkers and petie chapmen, [who] shal wander abroad and have not licence of two Justices of the peace at the leaste […]. (7)

Though the 1597 revision of this section of the act seems, as most scholars note, simply to reiterate the requirement that players “belong” to a Baron or better, there is a significant change in the section that immediately follows this requirement:

All fencers, Bearewards, common Players of Interludes, and Minstrels, wandering abroad (other then Players of Interludes belonging to any Baron

1 2.4.59-60
2 3.230-31
of this Realme, or any honourable personage of greater degree, to be authorized to play, under the hand and Seale of Armes of such Baron or P[er]sonage); all Juglers, Tinckers, Pedlers and Petie Chapmen wandering abroad …. (3)

Most obviously, the revised act distinguishes more fully players from other travelling performers and tradesmen; whereas previously all had been eligible for protection from charges of vagrancy, now it was only the players who could claim protection “under the hand and Seale of Armes” of the nobility. The revision also performs another, less explicit exclusion. While the 1572 act allowed for the licensing of certain travelling performers by two Justices of the Peace, the 1597 revision transfers this authority exclusively to the nobility. Furthermore, through the insertion of the phrase “hand and Seale,” notably absent from the 1572 Act, the 1597 revision pointedly alludes to the removal of the licensing power of Justices of the Peace, whose “hand and Seale,” which were a major source of authority for them in a way in which they were not for the nobility, had previously been sufficient for the protection of travelling performers. No longer, thanks to Elizabeth’s erasure of Justices of the Peace from the act, could the social rank of a Justice be calculated in simple arithmetic. That is, no longer could two Justices combine to equal a noble.

It is my contention that this should be read as a reflection not of the diminished social standing of administrative labourers, but of a desire to limit the growing power of public employees to the realm of administration and to exclude them from more social forms of status and power. This reading seems to be justified by James’s remarkably similar excision when he limited patronage of the London acting companies to the royal
family. The continued development of the English state bureaucracy in the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries brought with it a fundamental shift in the nature of the relationship
of monarchs and those responsible for administering the realm. As the reach of the
bureaucracy grew, so, too, did the bureaucracy itself, offering opportunities for social
advancement to a wide range of the English populace. This growth was repeatedly the
source of social anxiety and unrest and triggered a backlash against the rapid rise of
administrative labourers, who had, in large part, no genealogical claim to status.  
Contemporary works suggest, however, that there was another development in the nature
of administrative labour, in addition to the admission of the untitled to positions of power
in government; in works such as Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* and Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish
Tragedy*, the rise of the bureaucrat is accompanied by a concomitant depersonalization of
government, in which the office of administrator takes precedence over the administrator
himself, and the personal lives, even perhaps the individual subjectivities, of those who
hold government office are rendered, if not null and void, then at least insignificant.
Whereas the relationship of secretary and master, out of which the bureaucratic system
extrapolates *ad infinitum*, is often characterized in contemporary writings by an intensely
personal bond, in which the closeness of secretary and master borders on the homoerotic,
the fully bureaucratic system works through an evacuation of the personal from the
relationship, leaving in its place an exclusively professional association. The plays stage
the problem engendered by the conflict between these two models, exploring, in the
figures of Hieronimo and Sejanus, the displacement of the personal relationship of the

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3 As Mervyn James points out, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century civil unrest in
reaction to the actions of state agents was not a new development and had its antecedents
in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See his *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in
sovereign and his counsellor by its bureaucratic equivalent. This divorcing of the public and the private⁴ is further reflected in the relationship of the administrator to his office, as the office takes precedence over the office-holder, whose very expendability becomes one of the hallmarks of bureaucratic systems of government.

I

“This Other”: The Bureaucratic Outsider

Medieval bureaucrat-poet Thomas Hoccleve’s penchant for autobiography has provided both literary critics and scholars of English administrative history with a plethora of firsthand accounts of the nature of bureaucratic labour in the fifteenth century. As Ethan Knapp argues in The Bureaucratic Muse, Hoccleve’s employment as a clerk of the Privy Seal occurred at a significant point in the evolution of the English bureaucratic state:

The early fifteenth century was an important moment in the [history of] bureaucratic institutions. [...] In the history of bureaucratic structures, these [...] years witness three crucial developments: first, the continued separation of the central writing offices at Westminster away from the king’s household (the transition usually to mark their emergence from the shadows of personal regal government into the full-blown modernity of an independent civil service); second, the linguistic transition from the use of French and Latin as the chief languages of governmental business to the

⁴ As Timothy Reiss notes, up to and including the early modern period the word “private,” specifically denotes the loss or lack of public office, the negative connotations of which are still gestured at in the modern “privation” (Reiss 2003, 4).
adoption of English as an official language of state; and third, a growing
degree of laicization among the staff of the central writing offices. (5)

While Knapp’s decision to characterize “continued separation” as a “crucial
development” is somewhat perplexing, his larger point is supported by a number of
scholars of the medieval period. The “growing degree of laicization” to which he refers
resulted in the birth of what Robin Storey calls the “Gentleman-Bureaucrat,” 5 an
upwardly mobile class of administrative employee. Unfettered by the injunctions against
marriage to which their clerical counterparts submitted, these men were able to solidify,
and improve, their social standing over the course of generations. 6 Downplaying the
extent to which late-medieval English government saw substantial institutional
innovation, Gerald Harriss notes that the period was nonetheless significant for the
“professionalization and definition” of the offices of central government (Harriss 1993,
34). A. L. Brown notes further that already by the mid-fourteenth century approximately
forty thousand letters per year were being sent out from the three primary offices of the
English state bureaucracy, the chancery, the privy seal, and the signet (Brown 1989, 48).

This stands in stark contrast to the portrait painted of the development of the

5 See Robin Storey, “Gentleman-Bureaucrats,” Profession, Vocation, and Culture

6 One obvious, and extreme, example of this process is in the person of Geoffrey
Chaucer, son of a wine merchant, and grandfather to an eventual duchess. Indeed, by the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, generations were not even required for this sort of
transformation. As Florence Evans points out in The Principal Secretary of State: A
Survey of the Office from 1558 to 1680 (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1923), Thomas
Lake “went through the whole course, entering public life as [Secretary of State Francis]
Walsingham’s amanuensis, promoted first to be clerk of the signet, then in the next reign
to be secretary of the Latin tongue, and eventually attaining the goal of his ambitions as
principal secretary of state” (156).
proposes that, up until the reign of Henry VIII, English government was household
government, controlled directly by the king. Under Henry, he argues, state power moved
out of the immediate control of the king, and into the hands of his most powerful
advisors, specifically Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell. This move is what Elton
refers to as the “Tudor Revolution,” the creation of a form of government heretofore
unknown in England.

Since the publication of Elton’s book, historians have objected to a number of its
claims, high among them its central thesis. For instance, J. A. Guy argues in “The Privy
Council: Revolution or Evolution?” that, rather than signalling a sea change in the
English style of government, the increase in the power of the bureaucracy that Elton
identifies in the 16th century is in fact the logical outcome of a number of changes
instituted gradually since the reign of Henry VII. Using Elton’s own claims against him,
in a concise attack on the revolution hypothesis, Harriss posits, in place of a revolution,
an evolution, interrupted during the reign of Edward IV and revived under Henry VIII,
which led to the development of a lay bureaucracy outside of the king’s household. As
Harriss writes, “The nature of pre-Yorkist administration […] becomes a matter of some
importance and poses a dilemma for Dr. Elton. He cannot describe the drastic
innovations of Henry VII as the creation of household government, scarcely indeed as its
revival, without admitting the pre-existence of its antithesis, i.e. bureaucratic
government” (Harriss 1963, 24).

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7 For responses to Elton’s hypothesis, see Christopher Coleman and David
Starkey, eds., Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Administration
and Government (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986); S. J. Gunn, Early Tudor Government,
1485-1558 (London: Macmillan, 1995) 1-22; and Transactions of the Royal Historical
Indeed, as Harriss argues in “Political Society and the Growth of Government in Late Medieval England” (1993),

the central organs of state in late medieval England, far from remaining static and fossilized, were changing in response to the needs of an increasingly wide body of users. As the reach of government extended, and familiarity with its machinery broadened, so new procedures and new institutions were developed under pressures from both above and below, from rulers and ruled. (39)

The bureaucracy, then, was becoming a significant cultural presence well before Elton’s “Revolution” of 1530. However, it is important not to dismiss outright the ways in which the nature of governance did in fact continue to change in the early sixteenth century. As a number of critics have noted, the sixteenth century witnessed a number of changes in the administrative relationship between central government and its representatives at the periphery of the state. The patronage of territorial magnates by the crown and the increase in commissions of lieutenancy, among other gestures which invested local gentry with royal authority, increased the visible reach of royal authority beyond what it had been in previous centuries. Furthermore, with the increase in state intervention in local affairs came an increase in demand for people to carry out the state’s business in the

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counties, and, in order to satisfy that demand, the Elizabethan government turned with increasing frequency to the lay populations of the counties themselves.\(^9\) Thus, the government was not only becoming more visible, it was also becoming an increasingly common means by which local landowners, by entering into the service of the state, could increase their political power. Indeed, the effects of growing state administrative structures extended beyond owners, and a number of social historians have “emphasised the significance of the participation in the governmental processes of the upper ranks of the ‘peasantry’, the so-called ‘middling sort’ as presentment jurors in local courts, as church-wardens, overseers of the poor, and village constables” (Hindle 12).\(^10\)

As the Polish politician Wawrzyniec Goslicki, who wrote under his Latin name, Laurentius Grimalius Goslicius, demonstrates, similar effects were felt elsewhere in Europe as well. In *The Counsellor*, the first complete English translation of which appeared in 1598,\(^11\) Goslicki writes, in describing his vision for the structure of the Polish civil service, “our meaning is not that anye of the multitude, as Plowemen, Artizanes, and other persons of vile occupation shall aspire unto the offices” (21). He goes on to explain that, in order to ensure that the civil servant’s loyalties lie more with the ruler than the ruled, the role of counsellor to the king must be limited to “welthye Citizens, Gentlemen, and others of good education and wisdome” (21). As Teresa Baluk-Ulewiczowa notes,

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\(^11\) Teresa Baluk-Ulewiczowa notes a manuscript translation of Book One of Goslicki’s work that was composed before 1585 (275 n. 11); however, no translation was printed before the 1598 edition.
[The 1568 Latin version of *The Counsellor*] was published, distributed, and probably also presented to the King [of Poland] at the time when the long-drawn out campaign for political, economic, and social reform waged since the early 1500’s by the rising gentry class against the more privileged aristocrats and high officers of the state was rapidly reaching its boisterous climax […]. (259)

Goslicki’s book attempts to reformulate the conflict described by Baluk-Ulewiczowa by recasting the factions involved. Emphasizing the distance between wealthy citizens and “the multitude,” Goslicki implicitly aligns the rising gentry with the aristocracy. His position in this conflict is clear, and his objections to the entry of the labouring classes into civil service should be understood in the context of his declaring these same “persons of vile occupation” unfit for the priesthood and the military, and his more general denunciations of artisans and agricultural labourers as “vile,” “born to serve,” and “unfitte to governe” (22). In the face of drastic social upheaval, Goslicki’s characterization of them as “born to serve” is noteworthy in that it demonstrates the way in which his argument works to evoke a traditional feudal society. By excluding labourers from the three professional routes most likely to raise their social status, Goslicki further works to allay concerns about the stability of class boundaries that have been at least partially engendered by the increasing power of the lay bureaucracy in early modern Europe.

As Penry Williams writes, the ascendance of “low-born men” through the ranks of society by way of their employment in state administrative offices was a regular feature of mid-sixteenth-century English society: “Reviewing the sixteenth century as a
whole we can say that aristocratic birth and territorial power had ceased, by the later part of Elizabeth’s reign, to be in themselves a qualification for entry into the central élite. The great noble families had been ousted from the Privy Council, which had largely become the preserve of major office-holders” and “the demand for literate and lay administrators thrust into prominence, from about 1530 to about 1570, several low-born men” (428). As the period progressed, however, such opportunities became less common and “in the later part of Elizabeth’s reign government service had virtually ceased to carry men, in one generation, from the bottom to the top of society. The landowning class had educated itself for public office and had closed ranks against the low-born” (428). These accounts suggest two simultaneous historical phenomena: the emergence of a segment of the population whose possession of a specific set of skills offered them significant opportunities for social advancement, and the absorption of this segment into already-established social groups. As a result, by the end of the sixteenth century administrative labour came to signify in multiple and somewhat contradictory ways. On the one hand, for those in the employ of the state it represented an increasingly inaccessible means by which to increase one’s status; on the other hand, it continued to present for the nobility the potential permeability of class boundaries.

Both Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy and Jonson’s Sejanus condense this historical conflict into exemplary tales of specific relationships between ruler and servant. Each, in its own way, demonstrates an intense interest in the interplay between the dual energies of aristocratic anxiety regarding bureaucratic social climbing and frustrated bureaucratic ambition exemplified by works such as those of Goslicki and Hoccleve. Sejanus refigures the problem into a harrowing tale of the danger of the erotic access of the
favourite to the monarch. In so doing, it translates the potential threat of the secretary into an explicitly political context.\textsuperscript{12} The more explicitly bureaucratic of the two plays, \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}, offers a sympathetic account of the confusion between the personal position of the state servant and the increasingly abstract state. Like \textit{Sejanus}, it represents the increased social status of administrators in terms of the erotic threat of closeness; however, in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}, the threat lies not in Hieronimo the bureaucrat, but in his son, Horatio.\textsuperscript{13}

While Horatio is celebrated at court for his martial triumph, he is simultaneously reminded of his subordinate status. First, in his description of his capture, the Portuguese Prince Balthazar draws a sharp distinction between his two captors, Horatio and Lorenzo, the King’s nephew:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
BALTHAZAR  To him [i.e. Lorenzo] in courtesy, to this [i.e. Horatio] perforce.

He spake me fair, this other gave me strokes;

He promised life, this other threatened death;

He wan my love, this other conquered me. (1.2.161-164)
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

The exclusion of Horatio from courtly society is accomplished in a number of ways in this passage. First, Balthazar’s references to him as “this” and “this other” serve to

\textsuperscript{12} K. W. Evans agrees that \textit{Sejanus} is directly concerned with the changing nature of political power in early modern England, arguing that “Repelled by present materialism, and unaware that social changes in his day required radically new attitudes towards government, Jonson appeals as a cure for modern ills to the long-outdated principle of a hierarchically-ordered commonwealth, in which personal ambitions submit to the power of a paternalistic monarch, who rules for the common good.[…] Into Sejanus himself goes all Jonson’s distaste for the rising gentry class in his society, whose moral unworthiness constitutes for him a subversion of every true standard for social eminence” (249).

\textsuperscript{13} In some ways, this may even be seen as more threatening, in that it underscores the potential permanency of Hieronimo’s increased social status.
reinforce the division between Horatio and Balthazar, while also establishing Balthazar’s connection to Lorenzo and, by extension, the King. Furthermore, the repeated characterization of Horatio as violent, combined with the characterizations of Lorenzo’s courtly mildness, serves to further distance Horatio from courtly society. This distancing is, of course, made clearer with every anaphoric repetition in the passage.

Hieronimo’s subordinate status seems almost to be an obsession for Balthazar and Lorenzo, whose shock at discovering Horatio’s affair with Lorenzo’s sister, Bel-Imperia, is expressed in terms of social status both at the moment of its discovery, when Lorenzo exclaims, “What, Don Horatio, our knight marshal’s son?” (2.1.79), and in the manner of Horatio’s murder, as his hanging in the arbour is construed as an appropriate answer to what Lorenzo considers Horatio’s social presumptions: “Although his life were still ambitious, proud, / Yet is he at the highest now he is dead” (2.4.59-60). Lorenzo’s first comment is indicative of the value that he places on heredity, defining Horatio in terms of his parentage rather than by any virtues intrinsic to Horatio himself. Lorenzo envisions a society in which social status is, paradoxically, both determined entirely by birth and in need of defence from those who may not share this perspective. Of course, Hieronimo’s role as knight-marshal is predicated on a certain degree of access to the King. As such, he represents, for the characters in the play of lower social standing than him, a means by which they may approach the King, if only by proxy. A group of these characters, identified simply, though perhaps tellingly, as “Three Citizens” (3.13. sd 50), turn to Hieronimo, as one who has influence with the King, to “plead their several actions”

14 As Molly Smith notes in her discussion of the play, “Executions were reserved for the upper classes and important criminals, while criminals of the lower classes were hanged” (230 n.2). Thus, even the mode of Horatio’s murder serves to “put him in his place.”
(3.13.49). Indeed, Hieronimo, too, considers himself to be one of the King’s favourites, as he imagines, in a soliloquy at the opening of the previous scene, plying his own suit to the King: “Now, sir, perhaps I come and see the king; / The king sees me and fain would hear my suit” (3.12.1-2). Although Hieronimo’s distressed mental state at this point in the play would tend to discount what he says, the way in which he lacks any doubt about his ability to gain access to the king is indicative of Hieronimo’s confidence in his own closeness with the king and, more importantly, in his conviction that the king is interested in his well-being and advancement. Furthermore, the latter half of the scene provides a literal representation of Lorenzo and Balthazar’s efforts to distance Hieronimo from the king, when Hieronimo’s attempt to approach the king is thwarted by Lorenzo, who restrains Hieronimo, stating, “Back! Seest thou not the king is busy?” (3.12.28).

It does appear, at first glance, that there may be some justification for Lorenzo’s concerns, and for Hieronimo’s confidence, as the King speaks repeatedly of Hieronimo and Horatio in terms of closeness. For example, upon learning that Horatio and Lorenzo have captured Balthazar together, the King says to Hieronimo,

Hieronimo, it greatly pleaseth us
That in our victory thou have a share,
By virtue of thy worthy son’s exploit. (1.2.124-26)

The King’s rhetoric does indeed seem to elevate Hieronimo to a status approaching equality, through the close juxtaposition of his use of the royal first-person plural (“us” and “our”) and his claim that he and Hieronimo “share” in Spain’s military triumph. Again, when Horatio enters the scene, the King includes him in his greeting in such a way as to highlight his elevation of Horatio to a status approaching that of his two
aristocratic rivals: “Welcome Don Balthazar. Welcome, nephew. And thou, Horatio, though art welcome too” (2.1.132-33). Of course, these gestures are always explicitly marked by the King as tokens of his largesse and, in the case of the former, as conditional and temporary. In this way, Hieronimo and Horatio, though honoured, are simultaneously reminded of their inferior social status. This is perhaps most clear two scenes later, during the feast celebrating Spain’s victory over Portugal, as the King organizes the seating of his guests:

Sit down, young prince [Balthazar], you are our second guest;
Brother, sit down; and nephew, take your place.
Signior Horatio, wait thou upon our cup,
For well hast thou deserved to be honoured. (1.4.128-31)

Here, as in the above passage, the King refers to Horatio (as well as to Hieronimo) using the informal “thou” while using the formal “you” to indicate Balthazar. The way in which King simultaneously honours Horatio and reminds him of his place in society demonstrates clearly the division between those who achieve social status by birth, and those who are raised through service or by royal fiat.

It seems, then, that Lorenzo’s concerns about Hieronimo’s family becoming too close to the King are, if not unfounded, then at least exaggerated. Despite the King’s gestures of goodwill towards Hieronimo and his family, Hieronimo’s entry into the inner circle of the Spanish court is neither easy nor assured. In fact, Hieronimo’s exclusion from the king is not only personal, but also professional, as the king asks of Hieronimo later in the play, “Who is he that interrupts our business?” (3.12.30). Thus, with another invocation of the royal “we,” the king unwittingly draws a definitive line between himself
and Hieronimo, as not only is Hieronimo not allowed to “share” in the concerns of Spain, but he now finds himself characterized as being an intruder into if not in direct opposition to them.

After a fashion, this is true. Beyond the obvious fact that Hieronimo places himself in opposition to the interests of Spain by murdering Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Castile, and by facilitating Bel-Imperia’s suicide, there is another way in which Spain is impeded by Hieronimo. Hieronimo’s rise to power results, indirectly, in bringing Horatio and Bel-Imperia together, thus hindering the dynastic marriage planned for Bel-Imperia by the king and the Portuguese Viceroy. Thus, simply by virtue of his profession, Hieronimo becomes, no matter whether he is ambitious or not, a threat to the prosperity of Spain.

II

The Erotics of Secretaryship

The threat to authority and traditional power structures posed by the rise of the administrative state sometimes took the form of a literal threat, as seems to be the case with Hoccleve, in whose poetry financial concerns and complaints surface repeatedly. In “The Prive Scilence of Thomas Hoccleve,” Sarah Tolmie describes Hoccleve’s development of what she calls “a poetics of extortion” (299), which is made possible through his work as a clerk in the Office of the Privy Seal. Hoccleve’s work in the Privy Seal, which consisted primarily of the transformation of official decisions into official documents, allowed him access to confidential and potentially sensitive information.

Tolmie argues that Hoccleve consciously advertises himself, through the mention of his “prive scilence” (Hoccleve 4795), as a “potential blackmailer” (Tolmie 282).

Although Hoccleve’s blackmail seems to be a quasi-legitimate attempt to gain missing payment from his employer, the risk that agents of the state would use their position and influence for political or financial gain was one which weighed heavily on early modern writers on bureaucracy. This risk is, for instance, addressed in the Secretum Secretorum, or Book of the Secret of Secrets, which appeared in at least nine different English translations between 1350 and 1600. The book, whose main title, translated directly from Arabic, is The Book of the Science of Government, on the Good Ordering of Statecraft, is a guide to the proper management of a government. On the subject of the use of a secretary, the nine known translations differ somewhat. In the oldest complete English translation, dating from 1445, in a section entitled “How to choose writers to write thy secrets,” the anonymous translator advises that a good secretary must be “sly and wary, that no man see his privatest nether books,” for “thy prosperity is his, and his corruption thine” (83). Characterizing the relationship in terms of vulnerability and exposure, and tying these traits to the intermixing of the identities of master and secretary, the passage hints at the potentially erotic nature of the secretarial relationship.

Writing in the seventeenth century, Robert Cecil, Principal Secretary to James I, in an unusual and revealingly convoluted description sets out the conditions which make for proper behaviour in a secretary,

\[16\] That is, though his complaint was legitimate, his methods were questionable, at best.
If there be then a Secretary whose State can witnesse that he coveteth not for profit, and if his carefull life, and death shall record it, that love is his Object, if he deale lesse with other mens suites, whereby Secretarie’s gaine, then ever any did, if he prefer his Majestie, and despite his own. (3)

Rather than developing a positive model for good behaviour, Cecil offers instead admonitions against bad behaviour, and even these are couched in a relativism that hints at a certain pragmatism in his view of the office. Temptation, it seems, is unavoidable, and one must strive to minimize corruption rather than to avoid it entirely.

Furthermore, Cecil’s cautionary words are grammatically noteworthy and require careful reading. Though the sentence both begins (“If there be”) and ends (“if he prefer”) with conditional statements which seem to hint at some sort of recompense, whether material or spiritual, that the secretary will receive for his diligence and honesty, it ends with no indication of what that recompense might be. The secretary’s liminal status, bridging between those who govern and those over whom they govern makes him simultaneously useful and dangerous. But what then, of the open-endedness of Cecil’s sentence? Presented with four “if’s, the reader is left waiting for the expected “then.” The sentence refuses to be pinned down; quadruply conditional, it seems to end without resolving what is at stake in the relationship. Another, related problem with deciphering the sentence is the appearance of the pronoun “it” in the second conditional clause: “and if his carefull life, and death shall record it.” To what does “it” refer? Does it look forward, telling the reader that “death shall record” “that love is [the secretary’s] Object,” or does it gesture backward, linked as it is by the conjunction “and” to the previous clause, indicating the ideal secretary’s lack of concern for personal profit?
Another potential ambiguity in the passage complicates Cecil’s message further. The word “that” in the phrase “that love is his object” registers in two ways. First, and most obviously, it is a conjunction, linking the phrase, as discussed above, to the previous clause. However, it is also possible that the word “that” in this context is meant as a demonstrative pronoun rather than as a conjunction. That is, “that” could indicate that the “love” mentioned by Cecil is not a generalized Love, but rather a specific love that he mentions earlier in the tract. In either case, the key to understanding the sentence lies in understanding “that love” as the love between a secretary and his master/mistress. In the previous paragraph, Cecil explains: “As long as any matter of what weight is handled onely between the Prince and the Secretary: Those Councells are compared to the mutuall affections of two lovers, undiscovered to their friends” (3). Interestingly, in the space of only a few sentences, the nature of the love between a secretary and his master shifts: while love functions initially as an analogue to the relationship between Prince and Secretary, it seems to become, when described simply as “that love,” a literal description of the bond between secretary and master.

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has ably shown in her seminal work *Epistemology of the Closet*, the conceptual space of the closet is inextricably tied to tropes of self-revelation and of vulnerability, which are themselves often characterized in terms of an erotic relationship. As Alan Stewart argues, “the crisis of the epistemology of the closet” that is the subject of Sedgwick’s book “is inherent to and prefigured in the closet as architectural reality and topos in sixteenth-century England” (77). Indeed, that there is an erotics of secretaryship seems undeniable. For instance, Nicholas Faunt, clerk to Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary of State under Elizabeth I, strikes a similar note when
he declares of the secretary that “the dutie of a servant in this kind must proceed from a speciall loue and affeccion hee beareth towards his Master, y\textsuperscript{e} same beeinge grounded likewise upon some testimonie of his masters good opinion and recipracall love borne vnto him” (501).

The work of Jacques Derrida also sheds light on the potentially complex erotics of this relationship. In *The Post Card*, Derrida offers a series of impressionistic meditations on a postcard depicting Socrates hunched over a writing pallet while Plato dictates to him from behind. Returning again and again to this seemingly mistakenly inverted relationship, Derrida uses the image as a tool for exploring the power dynamics of the secretarial relationship and concepts of primacy and originality. Surfacing repeatedly in Derrida’s musings on the postcard is an interest in the potentially erotic nature of the relationship between master and scribe. Drawn repeatedly to an inexplicable, phallic object originating behind Socrates (and thus, Derrida concludes, from Plato), and extending beneath and along his seated form, Derrida writes,

> For the moment, myself, I tell you that I see Plato getting an erection in Socrates’ back and I see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing […] the copyist’s chair, before slowly sliding, still warm, under Socrates’ right leg. (18)

Derrida envisions the secretarial relationship as not only erotic, or even homoerotic, but as a complex power relationship in which traditional conceptions of authority and sexuality are, perhaps necessarily, undermined in the co-production of documents and of secrecy. In doing so, he inadvertently echoes the comments and perspectives of early modern writers on state service.
Despite significant textual evidence, contemporary critics of Renaissance culture have not always agreed about the eroticism of the secretary/master relationship. For instance, in “The Early Modern Closet Discovered,” Alan Stewart argues that “Only the secretary of a lady or queen is invariably seen as having a problematic degree of access to the mistress’ closet that renders their relationship sexually suspect” (8). Thus for Stewart, while the secretarial relationship is repeatedly characterized as bearing erotic potential, this is only the case in situations where the eroticism in question is heterosexual. Later in the article, Stewart offers one example which contradicts his earlier claim, that of Christopher Marlowe’s play Edward II, in which the relationship between the eponymous king and Piers Gaveston is clearly, and dangerously, sexualized. I would like to suggest another example that complicates Stewart’s assertion and offers insight into the eroticism of secretarial exchanges: Jonson’s Sejanus.

First, although the relationship between Sejanus, the eponymous hero of Jonson’s Roman tragedy, and the emperor Tiberius is never explicitly represented in the play in sexual terms, characters in the play do make a connection between Sejanus’ surprising rise to power and his complex sexual history. Interrupting Silius’ bitter, but enthusiastic, description of Sejanus’ high social status, Arruntius states, of Sejanus,

A serving boy?

I knew him, at Caius’ trencher, when for hire,

He prostituted his abused body

To that great gourmand, fat Apicius;

And was the noted pathic of the time. (1.212-216)
Inserting his comments between Sillius’ and Sabinus’ respective extollings of the heights of power to which Sejanus has ascended, Arruntius effectively associates Sejanus’ rise to power in the state with sexual availability. He implies, in other words, that the specifically homosexual prostituting of Sejanus’ youth is both responsible for and symptomatic of his close relationship with Tiberius. In Jonson and the Psychology of Theater, John Gordon Sweeney writes, “When Arruntius refers to [Sejanus] as Apicius’ ‘pathick’ there is no doubt that this is a sign of Sejanus’ degeneracy” (91). I would argue that, although the play leaves little doubt as to Sejanus’ moral failings, the trope of the “pathic” extends beyond the individual and encompasses both Sejanus and Tiberius. Indeed, Tiberius himself is later described by Arruntius as kidnapping the youth of “Noble Houses” (4.393) and giving them to “Masters of strange, and new-commented lusts, / for which wise nature hath not left a name” (4.400-401). Tiberius is not merely a procurer of youths, however; according to Arruntius, Tiberius “is […] become the ward / to his own vassal, a stale catamite” (4.403-404). Arruntius characterizes the relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus as one in which both Tiberius and Sejanus are figured as dependents – “ward” and “vassal” – to each other. Simultaneously debased and powerful, the relationship, in its doubleness, complicates the simple characterization of Sejanus as “catamite” to Tiberius. Thus the problem of Sejanus’ sexuality becomes a problem of the (sexual) availability of Tiberius to his counsellor, and, as such, becomes a statement not simply of the degeneracy of Sejanus himself, but of what are perceived to be the (homo)erotics of the secretarial/bureaucratic relationship, homoerotics figured significantly here as dangerous.¹⁷ Furthermore, and perhaps most crucially, it is a

¹⁷ Notably, Tiberius’ sodomitical tendencies are characterized as threatening to
situation in which the superior is penetrated by the inferior; that is, it is exactly the sort of master/secretary relationship that Stewart argues is nonexistent outside of Edward II.

Though Stewart overstates the case when he claims that Edward II contains the only representations in early modern drama of a homoeroticism that is connected to the relationship between master and secretary, he is indeed correct in asserting that such representations are scarce. How this is surprising is not entirely clear. Indeed, rather than the paucity of representations of secretarial homoeroticism being worthy of attention, it seems more noteworthy that such representations exist at all. The problem with Stewart’s line of inquiry is that he frames the analysis – a search for explicit representations of the threat of sexual intercourse between men – in such a way that his findings are virtually predetermined from the outset. By setting aside hints of or veiled references to male-male eroticism, Stewart strongly overstates the degree to which the problem of sexual access within the secretary’s closet is a purely heterosexual one. Indeed, further analysis of Sejanus indicates how closely related concerns about sodomy can be to concerns about bureaucratic ambition and access to the body of the king.

Unlike The Spanish Tragedy, Sejanus presents its audience with a protagonist whose ambition is undeniable. As Stuart Kurland argues, “in the play, Sejanus’ ambition is made to seem paramount” (63). At first glance, connections between Sejanus and early modern bureaucracy may seem tenuous at best. After all, the play seems to chart the fall not of a civil servant, but of the second most powerful man in the Roman Empire, whose

the class structure of Rome on two levels. First, as in many representations of bureaucratic and secretarial social climbing, sodomy is dangerous because it enables social climbing and thus the “penetration” of the nobility by social inferiors. It is also figured as a threat in that Tiberius is, in his sexually motivated kidnapping of the children of the nobility, undermining the heterosexual, patriarchal order through which the aristocracy reproduces itself.
access to the inner sanctum of the emperor’s court appears to be predicated on personal rather than professional status. However, as the case of Hoccleve, and others, makes clear, in a system of aristocratic government, such distinctions between the personal and the professional depend, in large part, on a formulation of the “private citizen” which, though sporadically evident in works prior to the seventeenth century, remained, as Timothy Reiss argues, “on emergent paths” (Reiss 2003, 442). Furthermore, the play is, as the following sections will explore, constructed in such a way as to become what Art Marmorstein describes as a “tragedy of the common bureaucrat” (65).

Inserting himself between Tiberius and the rest of Rome, Sejanus has the sort of access to the emperor of the sort that Lorenzo fears Hieronimo wants, and that Curtis Perry identifies as central to the trope of the “sodomite king” in early modern English political discourse. Rather than ending, as Stewart does, with Edward II, Perry’s article “The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England,” links the concerns surrounding Edward’s relationship with Gaveston to complaints made about similar, though not exclusively male-male, political relationships that surface repeatedly in such texts as the anonymous Catholic tract Leicester’s Commonwealth (1584), but which reach a peak during the reign of James I, whose relationship with the Duke of Buckingham was a common target of such criticisms. Furthermore, Perry links anxieties surrounding royal favouritism to the changing nature of early modern governance. He writes: “Animosity aimed at royal favoritism – under Elizabeth, and especially under James – expresses and is associated with more general frustrations born from strains upon the outmoded ideologies of royal bounty within the centralizing state” (1060). In the figure of Sejanus, Jonson draws a more explicit
connection between this anxiety and the growth of the bureaucratic state, whose structure extends the reach of the king as political figurehead through the limiting of access to the king’s physical person. In *Sejanus*, while this limited physical access is ensured by Tiberius’ self-imposed exile from Rome in the latter half of the play, it is Sejanus himself who controls access to the emperor from the outset.

Complaints about Sejanus’ close relationship with Tiberius are not, however, restricted to the register of sexuality. Indeed, the characterization of the relationship between Sejanus and the emperor as sodomitical seems, as Perry’s broader analysis suggests, to be more a reflection of a general dissatisfaction with Sejanus’ rise to power than a specific complaint about deviant sexuality. In *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*, Jonathan Goldberg analyzes the way in which, in *Edward II*, the language of male intimacy is only characterized as sodomitical when it is connected with Gaveston’s desire for, and attainment of, upward social mobility. This linking of inappropriate male-male relations and social ambition is also apparent in *Sejanus*. Commenting on Sejanus’ rise, Tiberius’ son Drusus asks, “Is my father mad? / Weary of life and rule, lords? Thus to heave / An idol up with praise! Make him his mate!” (1.548-50). Drusus’ comment highlights what he perceives to be the unnaturalness of Sejanus’ position as the confidante of the emperor, supplanting him, the heir presumptive, from his rightful place at his father’s side. However, while the language of male intimacy is certainly linked to social ambition in *Sejanus*, it is important to note that *Sejanus* is not suffused with such language as Goldberg argues that *Edward II* is. Following Tacitus’ claim that Tiberius, “dark as he was towards others, was rendered uniquely unguarded and unprotected in respect of Sejanus himself” (4.1.2), Jonson restricts the use of this
language of male intimacy so that it appears solely in conversations between Tiberius and Sejanus, thus, by perfectly overlapping the very limited social spheres in which the two modes of homoerotic discourse exist, making it virtually impossible to distinguish between licensed homoeroticism and sodomy in the play. Indeed, the intimate, personal relationship between Sejanus and Tiberius seems, at times in the play, a refuge from the calculating political agendas of Roman society. Furthermore, Arruntius’ characterization of the young Sejanus as “the noted pathic of the time” (1.216) presents Sejanus’ sodomitical nature as existing prior to his social climbing, when he was yet “a serving boy” (1.212). Likewise, Tiberius’ sexual appetites are not restricted to the social climber Sejanus, but are instead portrayed as a more general aspect of an emperor who is, in the words of the disaffected, and ultimately executed, Sabinus, “Bogged in his filthy lusts” (4.217). It seems clear, then, that accusations of sodomy in the text are not meant to be read entirely as afiguration or simply as the result or a reflection of inappropriate social ambition. Instead, the reader is presented with a confusion, in the style of Derrida’s postcard, of cause and effect, of superior and inferior, of lord – or “ward” – and vassal.

III

Public vs. Private

Perry notes that a number of critics have argued that James I and Marlowe’s Edward II have a great deal in common. Stephen Orgel goes so far as to call Edward II “a mirror of King James’s behavior” (48). However, Perry offers an important caveat to those looking for a perfect parallel between the two kings:

though James had favorites who attracted resentment as early as 1579, this argument seems weak to me: where much of the interest in Marlowe’s characterization of Edward stems from the relationship between his
patronage and his political ineffectiveness, the popular image of James as weak, debauched and politically irresponsible was not prevalent until after he came to England. As king of Scotland, James VI was seen as a strong and effective ruler, hardly an analogue for the monarch of Marlowe’s play.

(1056)

Though *Edward II* may not provide a satisfactory parallel, Jonson’s play offers something closer to public perception of the youthful James. As Mario DiGangi argues, “*Sejanus* exposes an important contradiction within the early modern discourse of favoritism. Tiberius is not necessarily weakened in his role as host, despite claims that he has abdicated his power by indulging his voluptuous body with parasitical minions” (123). Indeed, in Tiberius, whose character combines sexual appetite and political ruthlessness and effectiveness, Jonson creates something which is perhaps more in line with contemporary conceptions of James. That Jonson was jailed for treason as a result of his writing *Sejanus* seems to argue that the parallels were perhaps not lost on James himself. The reason, I would argue, for what DiGangi sees as a contradiction resides not within discourses of favouritism, but within the growth of the related conflict between traditional household government and the increasingly bureaucratized rule of the early modern state. Read in this context, the performance of physical openness, of availability to multitudes, is reflective of an expansion of the king’s presence through the expansion of the reach of his administrators. Thus, the dissipation of his influence throughout the realm registers in representations of the morally dissipated figure of the sodomite king.

Notably, Tiberius’ sodomitical desires are never demonstrated in the play, only reported, and even then only by his detractors. Furthermore, the play warns its audience
not to read Tiberius as uncomplicatedly reflected in others’ perceptions of him. According to Arruntius, whose outsider status in the play allows him both insights into the other characters and the ability to express them safely, Tiberius maintains careful control over the public persona that he projects: “the space, the space / Between the breast and lips—Tiberius’ heart / Lies a thought farther, than another man’s” (3.96-98). That is, Tiberius demonstrates an awareness of the importance of maintaining control over public perceptions of him, and of the need to maintain the separation of public and private, especially in his role as head of state. This personal dichotomy between “lips” and “heart” lies at the centre of the creation of a bureaucratic identity: the ability to filter out personal beliefs and relationships, or perhaps even to subjugate them to the needs of the state. It is, ultimately, the lack of this ability on Sejanus’ part that leads to his downfall.

The confusion of hierarchy engendered by the close relationship between administrator and monarch results in a complication in both Sejanus and The Spanish Tragedy of the roles of the protagonists in their societies. Both Hieronimo and Sejanus are represented, or represent themselves, initially as essential members of their respective courts. Sejanus is “the second face of the whole world” (1.217), whose influence on Tiberius is unparalleled. His relationship with the emperor is so close as to convince Tiberius that the two’s thoughts are virtually indistinguishable: “We can no longer / Keep on our mask to thee, our dear Sejanus; / Thy thoughts are ours, in all” (2.278-80). Mistaking the degree to which his closeness to Tiberius has raised him – that is, mistakenly understanding his relationship with Tiberius as personal rather than professional – Sejanus attempts to translate the political power that has been delegated to
him by Tiberius into a more permanent form through dynastic marriage. While Matthew Wikander argues that “Sejanus falls […] because he has failed to forestall the rise of Macro” (347), I would propose that it is the failure to forestall, or at least to slow, his own rise that brings about Sejanus’s downfall. Tiberius’ reaction to Sejanus’ desire to marry his daughter is indicative of the fact that the closeness between the two is not so absolute as Sejanus seems to believe:

To marry Livia? Will no less, Sejanus,
Content thy aims? No lower object? Well!
Thou know’st how thou art wrought into our trust;
Woven in our design; and think’st we must
Now use thee, whatsoever thy projects are:

’Tis true. (3.6.23-28)

It is, however, true only to a point. Despite Tiberius’ displeasure with Sejanus’ social ambitions, he is able to separate his employee from the social upstart, and thus simultaneously to make use of Sejanus’ skills as a ruthless administrator and to bring about his downfall as a rival for power. Unwilling to allow Sejanus to climb to a social rank beyond the one dictated by his birth, Tiberius turns to a new minion, Macro, in order to suppress Sejanus’ attempt to rise in status.

Macro has a different conception of what it means to serve the state, and his formulation of the nature of political service marks him as a different sort of civil servant from his predecessor:

Were it to plot against the fame, the life
Of one with who I twinned; remove a wife
From my warm side, as loved as is the air;
Practise away each parent; draw mine heir
In compass, though but one; work all my kin
To swift perdition; leave no untrained engine,
For friendship, or for innocence; nay, make
The gods all guilty: I would undertake

This, being imposed me, both with gain and ease. (3.726-35)

The move from private citizen to public servant requires an equivalent change, as Macro recognizes, from self-determined subject to tool. Though Macro’s willingness to renounce personal connection and responsibility in the pursuit of his labour for the state renders him monstrous, he is by no means singular in this regard.18 As the enemies of Sejanus note repeatedly, Sejanus’ underlings act not as autonomous subjects, but as the performers of their respective offices.

This privileging of profession is noted by a number of characters in the play. For example, Silius states to Agrippina, “You may perceive with what officious face, / Satrius and Natta, Afer and the rest / Visit your house of late, to enquire the secrets” (2.462-64). Silius’ use of the term “officious” here is telling. Simultaneously denoting falseness and profession, and thus conflating the two, the word encapsulates a fundamental shift in the perception of the way in which a government is run. Indeed, the word “officious” appears numerous times in the play, always spoken by Sejanus’ enemies, and virtually

18 Stanford Lehmberg’s account of Thomas Audley’s entry into state service is strikingly reminiscent of Jonson’s portrayal of Macro. Lehmberg writes, “Able administrators were badly needed, and Wolsey (among others) must have been glad of Audley’s help. Perhaps during this period, too, it became apparent that Audley had no personal conviction or conscience which would interfere with his service to the crown, and that he knew how to turn the fall of his superiors to his own gain” (10-11).
always in a strongly pejorative sense. Standing accused of treason, Silius refers to the Senate itself as “most officious Senate” (3.320), calling attention to the way in which his accusation has been both arranged and executed. As he has previously observed of his accusers, “Thou durst not tell me so, / Hadst thou not Caesar’s warrant. I can see / Whose power condemns me” (3.230-32). This use of “officious,” the linking of subordinacy and a sort of inauthenticity of self, is made explicit by Sabinus, who addresses the supporters of Sejanus who have accused him of treason as “My most officious instruments of state; / Men of all uses” (226-27). Characterizing his enemies as “instruments of the state,” Sabinus draws attention to the way in which they are merely extensions of their leader, whose personalities have been superseded and whose individuality has been cast off in order that they become multifaceted tools, whose vacuity allows them to be “Men of all uses.” Thus, in the “officious” world of the state bureaucracy, personal relationships are made subordinate to professional relationships, which are themselves voided of any individual subjective motivation. It is significant to note here that the play works, in its deployment of the language of office as well as in its more general representations of Sejanus and Tiberius, towards a formulation of identity which privileges the personal over the public, taking part in a discourse of the private self whose nature has been the topic of critical inquiry for generations of critics of the early modern period.\(^\text{19}\) At the same time, however, as argued above, in the play the boundaries between the two spheres are not rigorously demarcated.

\(^\text{19}\) For an account of the critical controversies surrounding early modern conceptions of selfhood over the last quarter-century, see Lee 1-91.
Monstrous though they may be,\textsuperscript{20} these servants are effective tools of the state for several reasons. For one, they act in perfect accordance with their orders; more important, however, is the public nature of their actions. Like Remirro de Orco, the cruel underling appointed by Cesare Borgia in Niccolo Machiavelli’s \textit{The Prince}, these “officers” draw negative attention away from the ruler, and allow him to distance himself from unpopular or even illegal actions.\textsuperscript{21} The parallel between Borgia and Tiberius is even more apparent given their respective uses of a single, brutal administrator whose deposition and execution serves, ostensibly, to purify the corruption of the state. Of course, this purification is illusory, as the rise of Macro in Sejanus’ place demonstrates. To blame the violence of the state on Sejanus is to misunderstand the nature of the power structure of which he is merely a part.

Like Sejanus, Hieronimo uses his political position to further personal ends. However, Hieronimo is in a singularly confusing position as regards the bureaucratic division between the personal and the professional, as his public position as knight-marshal, enforcer of the law, overlaps with his private role as vengeful father. While the legal system and, more specifically, its agent Hieronimo are meant to offer an institutionalized, and impersonal replacement for revenge, Hieronimo subverts the system and uses his position within it to effect his own very personal act of vengeance.

It is crucial, in order to understand Hieronimo’s place in the Spanish court, to recognize that \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} tells the stories of two different fathers and their reactions to the deaths of their respective sons. The most obvious of these stories is, of

\textsuperscript{20} As Danielle Bonneau notes, “monster” is another word that appears frequently in descriptions of Sejanus and his followers (54).

\textsuperscript{21} Daniel Boughner argues in “Sejanus and Machiavelli” that it is likely that Jonson had \textit{The Prince} in mind, if not at hand, while composing \textit{Sejanus}.  

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course, the main plot of the play: Hieronimo’s search for and eventual vengeance upon the murderers of his son, Horatio. However, early in the play, another father reacts to the news that his son has been killed: the first act sees the Portuguese Viceroy informed, erroneously, of the death in battle of his son, Balthazar. Balthazar is reported to have been killed, like Horatio, by a countryman and fellow soldier, in this case, the Portuguese courtier Alexandro. Tellingly, and not surprisingly, given the difference in social status between Horatio and Balthazar, the ways in which the men’s deaths are mourned by their respective states are markedly different. Of course, a comparison between Horatio, the son of an administrator, and Balthazar, the son of the Viceroy, is imbalanced; that the comparison is imbalanced is the point. It is important to note, though, that the play seems to encourage this comparison, as the two men’s roles in the play are suggestively parallel. After all, Horatio is, in Balthazar’s own words, his “other” (1.2.162, 163, 164).

Repeatedly in the play, the two men stand as rivals. As foes on the battlefield and in competition for Bel-Imperia’s love they are held up for comparison, with Horatio the victor each time. Through these repeated comparisons, the play encourages its audience to view Horatio as the more valuable member of his society, both materially and erotically, and thus to see the justice in Hieronimo’s desire that the state recognize, and account for, the death of his son. However, despite Horatio’s apparent inherent superiority, it is Balthazar’s death, misreported though it may be, which effects the greatest reaction from the state. While the mere possibility of Balthazar’s death sends the Portuguese Viceroy into a frenzy, and results in the immediate threatening of a death sentence against his suspected murderer, the Spanish King remains unaware of Horatio’s death until the final
moments of the play. Indeed, even once Hieronimo explains the reason for the massacre of the royal heirs, the king seems oddly unable to comprehend:

   HIERONIMO: O, good words!
   As dear to me was my Horatio
   As yours, or yours, my lord, to you.
   My guiltless son was by Lorenzo slain,
   And by Lorenzo and that Balthazar
   Am I at last revengèd thoroughly,
   Upon whose souls may heavens yet be avenged
   With greater far than these afflictions.
   […]
   KING: Why speakest thou not?
   […]
   KING: Fetch forth the tortures! Traitor as thou art,
   I’ll make thee tell. (4.4.168-184)

Horatio’s death is, in and of itself, insignificant to the King, so much so that he seems unable to recognize the fact of its having occurred. The audience is left with the impression that, had Hieronimo not taken it upon himself to massacre all but one member of each of the royal houses of Spain and Portugal, Horatio’s death could have passed without having any measurable effect on the Spanish state.

   Ultimately, despite Sejanus’ vastly more powerful social position, his death has a similar impact on Roman society as Horatio’s does on Spain. As Sejanus’ administration of the Roman state is depicted throughout most of Sejanus as singularly Machiavellian
and cruel, it would seem logical that his removal from power should result in some improvement of the way in which the state is run. This, however, is not the case. Instead, Sejanus is replaced by Macro, who is, as Tiberius himself admits, no improvement: “He / Must be the organ, we must work by now; / Though none less apt for trust” (3.648-50). Indeed, Tiberius describes Macro as equivalent to Sejanus, characterizing them as “two poisons” working against each other (3.654). Thus, though Tiberius speaks of and to Sejanus in terms reminiscent of secretarial doctrines of intimacy and devotion, Sejanus’ role in Roman society turns out to be that of a replaceable bureaucratic subject, whose personal connections to his ruler are irrelevant, if not detrimental, to his work as a functionary of the state.

In The Spanish Tragedy and Sejanus, Kyd and Jonson, respectively, depict a collision between a traditional understanding of the role of the secretary as close advisor and confidante to his master and the modern bureaucratic employee whose very replaceability is intrinsic to his role in the day-to-day operations of the state. Sure of their respective places, both Hieronimo and Sejanus misread their political power as inherent in themselves rather than, as it turns out to be in both cases, delegated temporarily to them by their respective rulers.

There is something else that is odd about the King of Spain’s apparent inability to hear Hieronimo’s explanation of his motives for killing Balthazar and Lorenzo. Between the King’s two exhortations to Hieronimo to confess that which he has already confessed, Hieronimo, too, makes a baffling assertion:

KING: Why speakest thou not?

HIERONIMO: What lesser liberty can kings afford
Than harmless silence? Then afford it me.

Sufficeth I may not, nor I will not tell thee. (4.4.179-82)

Suddenly, Hieronimo seems to join the king in claiming that he has not already explained his motives. He follows this assertion with a dizzyingly self-contradictory statement:

Thou mayest torment me as his wretched son

Hath done in murd’ring my Horatio;

But never shalt thou force me to reveal

The thing which I have vowed inviolate. (4.4.185-88)

Clearly, Hieronimo’s unwillingness to speak has little to nothing to do with any actual investigation of the murders. It is, along with the subsequent cutting out of his own tongue and suicide, instead a final expression of autonomy, a denial of the King’s right to access to Hieronimo’s thoughts, access which, as the following chapter will show, is fundamental to the functioning of the bureaucratic relationship, and upon which the organization of the bureaucratic state is predicated. Furthermore, the appearance in Hieronimo’s hands of a pen in the moments immediately preceding his suicide forcefully recasts Hieronimo in the role of bureaucrat, preparing to transcribe the confession of a murderer. The fact that he himself is that murderer underscores what will be the other major concern of the following chapter: the schizoid nature of bureaucratic subjectivity, the constitution of which depends on exaggerating the public/private division explored in this chapter to such lengths that the bureaucrat becomes alienated from himself in the process.
Chapter Three: Documenting Bureaucratic Identity

To a Closet, there belongeth properlie, a doore, a locke, and a key: to a Secretorie, there appertaineth incidentlie, Honesty, Care, and Fidelitie.

Angel Day, *The English Secretary*¹

Although the secretary’s closet may seem to mark the arrival of this study in a highly straitened domain, it is the argument throughout that it represents the locus through which a modern individuality emerges, with extensions to all who write.

Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter*²

These two epigraphs would seem, on first reading, to offer diametrically opposed views of the nature of secretarial work in early modern England. While Goldberg’s work promotes the role of the secretary in forging new concepts of individual subjectivity, *The English Secretary* seems to do quite the opposite. The 1586 edition of *The English Secretary* consisted of two parts: a letter-writing manual and a guide to rhetorical tropes, the latter serving as supplement to the former. To the 1599 edition, however, Day added a third section. This section, entitled “The parts, place, and office of a secretorie,” from which the above quotation originates, is an extended treatise on the practice and ethics of secretarial labour. In this third section, Day envisions secretaryship as an all-subsuming professional identity, negating the individuality of the secretary both by figuring him, in the above epigraph and elsewhere, as the human equivalent of a closet, and by collapsing the distinction between title and function, decreeing that the secretary is “both Name and Office in one” (103). Indeed, Day’s book, itself called “Secretary,” offers a third

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¹ Angel Day, *The English Secretary*, 2nd ed. (1599; Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967) 103.
denotation for “Secretary,” a word already assigned two meanings by Day’s formulation “Name and Office,” which refers, respectively, to the individual and the profession. The secretary diffused further through this last usage, becoming, performatively, merely a formulary, a collection of conventional responses to various bureaucratic and epistolary needs. This is not to say, however, that Day is entirely unaware of the potential power of the secretary. Drawing attention to the secretary’s role as “a keeper or conserver of the secret unto him committed” (103), Day alludes to the source of this power. In this way, Day, like Hoccleve and Spenser, places stress on the power that these secrets afford him.

This chapter continues the trajectory of the previous chapter, tracing a shift from the close, potentially erotic dynamics of the master/secretary relationship to the increasingly diffuse and impersonal construction of secretarial labour in the context of the early modern bureaucratic state. In it, I will argue that, though the master/secretary relationship is portrayed by early modern writers as intensely personal and empowering, representations of bureaucratic labour, and the products of that labour, are characterized instead as deceptive, unstable, alienated, and alienating.

I
In and Out of the Closet

Given Alan Stewart’s antipathy, in “The Early Modern Closet Discovered,” towards a queer reading of the early modern secretarial closet, it is perhaps not surprising that he finds himself writing in opposition to Rambuss, whose work following Spenser’s Secret Career, Closet Devotions (1998), engages in a reading of the homoerotics of devotional literature and the place of the closet in it. In a note, Stewart dismisses Rambuss’s analysis of The English Secretary, specifically his focus on connections between secretarial secrecy and subjectivity, as reductive (Stewart 97 n.22). The
connection between secrecy and subjectivity pursued by Rambuss draws on D. A. Miller’s essay “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets,” in which Miller writes that secrecy is “the subjective practice in which the oppositions of public/private, inside/outside, subject/object are formed” (193). Stewart’s objection to Rambuss’s argument seems to stem from Rambuss’s understanding of the closet as a singular, private space. That is, the closet exists as a liminal space between the public and the private: a private space in which two – master and secretary – work together. Concern about what Stewart sees as a mischaracterization of the closet is a common theme in his article; he makes similar complaints about *Writing Matter* (Stewart 83) and Marc Girouard’s *Life in the English Country House* (81). The early modern closet, Stewart argues, “is not designed to function as a place of individual withdrawal, but as a secret non-public transactive space between two men behind a locked door” (83). As such, Stewart seems to claim, the private space of the closet cannot be, as Rambuss argues, analogous to the secretary’s sense of his own private interiority. Stewart’s argument is problematic, I believe, on two fronts. First, the conceit to which Stewart objects – that the secretary’s closet serves as a simile for the secretary himself – is not Rambuss’s. In *The English Secretary*, as Stewart acknowledges, Day draws clear analogical parallels between the person of the secretary and the space of the closet. Furthermore, he does so, as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, specifically by envisioning the closet as a space of secrecy and of concealment. Second, Stewart’s criticism of Rambuss’s analysis depends on an anachronistic conception of individual interiority and subjectivity. That Day’s portrait of the secretarial self is not completely rhetorically or philosophically consistent should not be surprising, given that he is writing at a time when, as many critics have noted, conceptions of
individual, bourgeois subjectivity were in their early stages of development, if not entirely absent in any sort of rigorous philosophical form. Indeed, as Katharine Eisaman Maus shows in *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, the interior self was often depicted in early modern writings, especially in religious works, as the “transactive” site of private relationships, often a relationship with God. According to Maus, the early modern secretive subject was at times understood “as simultaneously the object of a double scrutiny: of a human vision that is fallible, partial and superficial, and of a divine vision that is infallible, complete, and penetrating” (11). Maus’s claim is useful to me not because it suggests that master/secretary relationship was conceived of as equivalent to the relationship between human and god, but because my intention is to point out that an outright dismissal of links between secretarial secrecy and a sense of subjective interiority of the sort that Stewart engages in is difficult to support, given that interiority in the sixteenth century was conceived of precisely in terms of intersubjectivity and of secret transactions.

I would like to suggest that some of these problems of definition, with regard to the secretary, arise from the way in which early modern writers on secretaryship seem to move effortlessly between figurative and literal statements on the nature of the master/secretary relationship. For example, Day seems to move seamlessly from describing the secretary’s work within the closet and characterizing the secretary himself as the closet. As described in Chapter Two, Robert Cecil moves from love as an analogue to the master/secretary relationship to describing that same love, now literally, as the foundation upon which the relationship must be built in order to be successful.
In *Writing Matter*, Goldberg points out one of these ambivalent moments in Day’s work, characterizing it as “delineating the office of the secretary on a double basis” (268). Goldberg is commenting on a passage in which Day attempts to describe the relationship of secretary to master: “Hee is in one degree in place of a servant, so is he in another degree in place of a friend” (Day 106). Goldberg argues that such double structures are deployed in Day’s work as a means of sidestepping what he describes as “aporetic” moments in the text (268). I would argue that rather than defusing such moments, this doubleness, which is, as the example of Cecil demonstrates, by no means unique to Day’s writing, allows for multiple, potentially contradictory meanings to exist simultaneously within these treatises. Furthermore, it allows bureaucratic writers to invert, or at least to complicate, the traditional hierarchy of master and secretary, and to investigate secretarial identity as the potential bearer of some sort of individuated selfhood. However, in Day’s work, the secretarial self remains elusive; rather than actually being a servant or a friend, the secretary acts “in place of” one. Constantly shifting roles according to the desires and needs of his employer, the secretary is a representative figure, a cipher upon whom his master may project a dialogic other against and with whom to converse.

It is important not to conflate too fully the role of the secretary and bureaucratic labour more generally. While the secretary described by Day was generally bound to one master, a bureaucrat like Hoccleve functioned instead as a go-between between different bureaucratic offices or officials and was rarely in direct personal contact with those on whose behalf he wrote. This replacement of the bivalent personal relationship with the multivalent professional one is problematic for Francis Walshingham’s secretary Nicholas Faunt. Faunt’s “Discourse Touching the Office of Principal Secretary of
“Estate” was written in 1592, at the end of Walsingham’s tenure as Principal Secretary, a time at which Faunt found himself without any assurance of continued employment. Because of his close relationship with his employer, Faunt understands himself to be professionally attached to Walsingham, and thus sees their two positions terminating as one. In response to his perceived imminent unemployment, Faunt draws attention to his experience and his understanding of the way in which the office ought, in his mind, to function: “Onely I have thought it not amisse […] to set down these few notes, which in my poore experience I thinke it not altogether unnecessary to bee perused by him, that shall enter into this place” (500). Notably, in the opening of the “Discourse,” the experience of which he speaks is not characterized as “poore” at all, and he draws attention the fact that the new Secretary will be in need of employees “of some more ripenes of judgment in the newe offices gathered by former experience” (499). Faunt seems clearly to understand the important role that the staff of the Secretary plays in the proper functioning of the office. However, he seems wary of declaring outright the degree to which the office in which he worked functioned independently of its master – understandably so, given that his treatise is a sort of application for a post under the new Principal Secretary. The frequency to which he returns to concerns regarding the selection of the Secretary’s servants, though, is telling. The Secretary’s employee, he argues, “must giue himself wholly to his Master,” and “all things bee done for his Masters creditt and honnour which in noe case should be imparted or deuided to anie friend or favorite” (501). Faunt’s use of the word “imparted” is notable for the way in which it functions in two different ways in the passage. On the surface, “imparted” suggests “communicated,” and thus partakes in the usual discourse of secrecy with which
theories of secretaryhood are eminently concerned. Simultaneously, though, the conjunction of “imparted” and “divided” suggests a reading of “imparted” as “partitioned.” In this way, Faunt creates a fantasy of the master and secretary as separate from society and from the competing demands of “friend” and “favorite.” However, the concern with “division” envisions the master’s “creditt and honnour” as a limited resource, one which, through injudicious and excessive division, could be dangerously depleted. Thus, Faunt demonstrates his understanding of the way in which the bureaucratic extrapolation of the master-secretary relationship threatens the personal, clos(eted)ed relationship between master and secretary by reproducing on an institutional level and sapping it, through excessive “division,” of much of its personal and erotic energy. The bureaucratic secretary becomes, once again, similar to Day’s repository of conventional responses and actions.

In both early modern texts and recent scholarship on them, secretarial labour is, for the most part, envisioned as a private, one-on-one relationship. Furthermore, though the potential blackmail discussed by Hoccleve and Spenser seems invariably to refer not to state secrets, but to personal secrets to which they had become privy, the distinction between the two spheres is somewhat ambiguous, if it exists at all. For instance, though Spenser’s knowledge of the Earl of Leicester’s marriage is undoubtedly “personal” information, the publication of this information (when it was eventually made public – though not by Spenser) was undeniably political. This exemplifies one of the ways in which the bureaucratic system and the secretarial system differ. That is, while the space of the secretary – the closet – is contained, for the most part, within the privacy of his master’s home, the space of the bureaucrat is the office, a public space. Though, as
Lynne Magnusson states in *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, “The early modern state transacted its administrative business, for the most part, in personal letters” (92), a new model was emerging.\(^3\) As the private closet comes to be replaced by the public office, the personal, private binary of master and secretary becomes diffused throughout the bureaucratic structure of the state. In response to, and against, this movement stand Nicholas Faunt’s complaints and warnings about “the multitude of [...] servantes” (500) working under Walsingham. “[F]rustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pa[u]ciota [It is vain to do with more what can be done with less],” he warns (500). Indeed the very title of Faunt’s “Discourse,” as Florence Evans points out, marks the transitional period, in terms of perception of the office, in which he was writing. Evans notes that the use of the term “Principal Secretary of Estate” in the title of the “Discourse” is an example of a use of that title in its early form. [The Discourse itself] proceeds to describe Walsingham merely as ‘principal secretary to the queen’s majesty,’ the addition of the phrase ‘of state’ remaining throughout the early seventeenth century a matter merely of choice or chance. (152 n.2) This inconsistency underscores the way in which public perception of civil service was changing in seventeenth-century England, as personal allegiance to the sovereign began to be consistently reformulated as impersonal allegiance to the state. Writing in 1592, Faunt engages in a nostalgic hearkening back to a time before government was performed

\(^3\) Or, rather, as mentioned in Chapter Two, and as numerous historians of the medieval period have pointed out, the bureaucratic model was re-emerging.
by a “multitude of servants,” in which, he imagines, it was possible to fashion a private, personal relationship between master and secretary.⁴

Angel Day’s portrait of the secretary standing “in place of” servant or friend, like his description of the secretary as the human equivalent of a closet, works to objectify the secretary. That is, in both cases the secretary serves more as vessel than as an individuated subject in the modern sense. Commenting further on the “in place of” formulation, Goldberg writes, “If the secretary is not defined as the hand or pen […], these descriptions of the office define the secretary as the letter” (268). In Goldberg’s equation here, the letter – and, by extension, the secretary – functions as a representative of the absent letter-writer. This conception of the letter as an agent in and of itself is, as Goldberg indicates, derived from the epistolary theory of Renaissance humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who, in De conscribendis epistolis, posits the letter as making the absent present over great distances. A further link in the chain of mediation, the secretary is also, I would like to note, the reader and writer, and thus interpreter, of letters to and from his master. The letter thus becomes the representative of the secretary, who is himself, letter-like, the representative of his master. In his introduction to Writing Matter, Goldberg states that the secretary’s closet “represents the locus through which a modern individuality emerges” (9). Playing on Goldberg’s image of the individual “emerging” from the secretary’s closet, I would like to shift my focus to an object which habitually emerged from this same space: the bureaucratic document.

⁴ Of course, as the example of Hoccleve, who was dead some 166 years by 1592, indicates, Faunt’s idealized portrait of bureaucratic labour was already, by the time it was written, well out of date.
II
“Nothing but the bare empty box”: Inside the Bureaucratic Document

The hidden nature of the secretarial closet necessitated the production of bureaucratic documents as a means of communication. Furthermore, as looser, more personal forms of government give way to a more rigorously codified and centralized administrative structure, the state’s dependence on documents to function, if anything, increases. Despite their closeted origins, bureaucratic documents could be, in many ways, unmistakably public. Moving through English society, passed from one hand to another, the bureaucratic document had to be constructed in such a way that its contents were invisible to any but its intended audience, even as it was itself intensely visible. As such, the document came to be composed of two interdependent parts, which I will refer to as the content and the apparatus. The apparatus itself consisted of a number of parts, each of which served, solely or in conjunction with others, to authenticate the document’s provenance. The apparatus could consist of, among other things, a seal, a signature, or the testimony of the document’s bearer. Some of these marks of authenticity also served to protect the document from unauthorized eyes, and to this end the bureaucratic document was often transported inside a wooden box.⁵ What is interesting about the wooden box is that, in order to protect the content of the document it obscures the document entirely, while simultaneously drawing attention to itself. Indeed the box is not unlike bureaucrat-poets Hoccleve and Spenser in advertising itself as possessing contents to which only a select audience may be granted access. Two early modern plays, Thomas

⁵ See, for example, the instructions by the governing council of the Virginia colony to Governor Thomas Gates: “You must take especial care what relacions come into England and what lettres are written and all things of that nature may be boxed up and sealed and sent to first of the Council here” (qtd. in Bemiss 47).
Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, offer illustrations of some of the effects that this packaging of the bureaucratic document can have on its interpretation.

About halfway through Kyd’s play, a letter appears which causes problems for a number of characters who come in contact with it. This letter is not, in fact, a letter—it is only the spectre of a letter, appearing and disappearing, ghost-like, over the course of three scenes. For instance, it “appears” before the murderer Pendringano as he stands on the gallows, about to be executed. Pendringano asks the hangman, “Sirrah, dost see yonder boy with the box in his hand?” The hangman replies, “What, he that points to it with his finger?” (3.6.66-7). The boy in question is one of Lorenzo’s pages—the box at which he points contains, Pendringano believes, a letter of pardon granting him freedom. The audience knows, however, thanks to a prior scene in which the page admits to having opened the box, that the boy carries “nothing but the bare empty box” (3.5.6); Pendringano’s pardon does not exist. Although it is a nonexistent document, the pardon is strikingly present and persistent in the text of the play. In the scene immediately following Pendringano’s execution, the apparently illiterate hangman appears in Hieronimo’s office bearing a note that he has removed from the hanged man’s body. He says, of the recently deceased murderer, “Oh lord, sir, he went the wrong way; the fellow had a fair commission to the contrary” (3.7.22-23). Holding up a letter, he continues,

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6 Citing the hangman’s belief that Pendringano was wrongfully hanged, James Shapiro, in “‘Tragedies naturally performed’: Kyd’s Representation of Violence,” *Staging the Renaissance: Representations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1991), reads the passage as an instance of “judicial failure” (103). However, this reading is severely undermined by the fact that what Pendringano is holding is not a “passport,” but a confession to murder. Molly Smith’s less emphatic claim that Pendringano’s letter “forces Hieronimo to confront the inadequacy of the
“Sir, here’s his passport; I pray you, sir, we have done him wrong” (3.7.23-24).

Pendringano’s “passport,” or pardon, turns out to be nothing of the sort. It is, instead, a note implicating Lorenzo and the Portuguese prince Balthazar in the death of Horatio.

As a servant of the royal family, Pendringano is an authorized bearer of royal pardons. For this reason, it is not entirely unreasonable that the hangman reaches the preposterous conclusion that Pendringano allowed himself to be executed while holding his pardon in his hand. Like Pendringano in the previous scene, the hangman mistakes the apparatus of bureaucratic authority for the expression of that authority. Erroneously understanding the apparatus as a direct and uncomplicated signifier of content, these characters demonstrate problems inherent in the public performance of secrecy undertaken by the bureaucratic state.

Of course, being able to understand what was, in fact, inside the bureaucratic document was not an uncomplicated matter for early modern readers. As the state became more and more dependent on the circulation of bureaucratic documents as a means of delegating and enforcing authority, readers of these documents came to be equally dependent on the apparatus of the bureaucratic document as a means of interpreting the content. Writing in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the diarist John Evelyn recounts an occasion in which the improper construction of an injunction resulted in mass confusion as to how, or even whether, to read the content of that injunction:

All the discourse now was about the bishops refusing to read the injunction for the abolition of the test &c. It seems the injunction came so judicial system” (227) offers a more accurate assessment of the effects of the letter on Hieronimo.
crudely from the secretary’s office that it was neither sealed nor signed in form nor had any lawyer been consulted, so as the bishops who took all imaginable advice put the court to great difficulties how to proceed against them. (qtd. in Evans 168 n. 1)

Rather than act on the content of the injunction, the bishops fall instead to the difficult task of attempting to determine the legitimacy of the document. Thus, the unmistakeable meaning of the document is marginalized in favour of a debate about matter and legitimacy.

A similar problem is staged in *The Spanish Tragedy*, as Hieronimo finds himself unable to act upon a document whose provenance is, to his bureaucratically trained eyes, unclear. In the third act of the play, a curiously brief stage direction indicates that “a letter falleth” (3.2.sd 23) to Hieronimo from above. The letter comes from Bel-Imperia, the lover of his murdered son. Bel-Imperia has, at this point in the play, been imprisoned by her brother, Lorenzo. In this letter, Bel-Imperia informs Hieronimo that it was Lorenzo and Balthazar, the Portuguese prince, who murdered his son. Rather than seek revenge immediately, Hieronimo pauses, unsure of what to do. He counsels himself,

*Hieronimo, beware; thou art betrayed,*

*And to entrap thy life this train is laid.*

*Advise thee, therefore; be not credulous.*

*This is devisèd to endanger thee,*

*That thou, by this, Lorenzo shouldst accuse:*

*And he, for thy dishonour done, should draw*

*Thy life in question and thy name in hate.*
I will therefore by circumstances try
What I can to confirm this writ. (3.2.37-49)

Rather than taking the letter at face value, Hieronimo doubts its authenticity and resolves to verify the identity of the letter’s author. The bureaucrat deals, for the most part, with letters composed by committee, letters whose authority is based not on a singular, attributable author, but on an overarching supervisory authority whose approval is marked either mechanically, by seal or signature, or anecdotally, by the letter carrier. Notably, in Bel-Imperia’s letter to Hieronimo, the apparatus is missing: the letter is neither sealed nor delivered, nor does it bear an authenticating signature. The lack of the conventional bureaucratic apparatus of authentication is not surprising, given that Bel-Imperia’s note is emphatically not bureaucratic in character.

In a discussion of what he calls the “containment” of parody, Mark Jones argues for a return a broader definition of parody, based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s formulation of parody in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Jones writes, “In Bakhtin’s conception, parody is not a genre but a degree of dialogism; and by virtue both of its dialogism and of its generic indistinctness from nonparodic forms, it functions not as criticism, but, to the contrary, as a challenge to critical discernment and authoritative interpretive practice” (57). This understanding of parody offers a useful means by which to examine the function of Bel-Imperia’s letter in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Without official bureaucratic modes of authentication, Hieronimo is unable to discern anything about the letter that is a convincing marker of Bel-Imperia’s authorship. The dilemma dramatizes a conflict between two incompatible modes of communication: Bel-Imperia’s personal missive and
Hieronimo’s bureaucratic attempts to interpret it. However, the problem with reading the scene as parodic is that parody presupposes an original. In the case of Bel-Imperia’s letter, what is original and what is parody is not entirely clear. Bel-Imperia’s letter, standing for some imagined pre-bureaucratic mode of communication, would seem to represent some sort of “original” form of communication that has been debased by the proliferation of bureaucracy. However, it is also possible to argue that, in the hyper-bureaucratic context of *The Spanish Tragedy*, her letter travesties the more “normal” – that is, the bureaucratic – mode of communication by which Hieronimo attempts to interpret it. In a confusion of original and copy, of the kind discussed in Chapter Two, Bel-Imperia’s letter marks an epistemological boundary for Hieronimo. Unable to “know” Bel-Imperia’s letter on its own terms, Hieronimo’s understanding of the world around him is defined by his bureaucratic employment.

Interestingly, while Hieronimo is unable to take Bel-Imperia’s letter at its word, he is later perfectly willing to accept the truth of Pendringano’s note, which also names the murderers of his son. In bureaucratic terms, this is understandable, as Pendringano, who is Bel-Imperia’s servant, is an authorized bearer of documents, while Bel-Imperia, from whose authority Pendringano gains his, is not. In this way, the play dramatizes the centrifugal nature of authority in a bureaucratic structure, examining the way in which the transfer of authority becomes, not a temporary delegation, but an evacuation of power. Moreover, in the world of the play the bureaucratic document, and, I would argue, in early modern England, is understood virtually as an autonomous agent, whose interior meaning is bound up with, and sometimes subjugated to, its exterior performance of authority.
Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, first performed in 1614, undertakes a carnivalesque treatment of many of the same themes. The play follows the misadventures of a number of “proper” London citizens—including two bureaucratic types, Justice Adam Overdo and John Littlewit, a proctor—as they are duped, manipulated, and cheated on a visit to the St. Bartholomew’s day fair. In the play, judicial authority is easily usurped and manipulated by the citizen characters, whose understanding of its workings allow them to take advantage of the office holders’ tenuous hold on power. Three documents circulate through the world of this play: a marriage license, with which the play opens and closes, a warrant authorized, though not written, by Justice Overdo, and another warrant that, like Pendringano’s pardon in *The Spanish Tragedy*, initially exists only as an expectation in the imagination of a character before finally becoming a physical object.

Throughout most of *Bartholomew Fair*, Trouble-All, listed in the *dramatis personae* as “a madman,” wanders from scene to scene, demanding that everyone who passes him produce a warrant from Justice Overdo, licensing them in whatever activity in which they happened to be engaged. Eventually, Knockem, one of the denizens of the fair, after inviting Trouble-All to drink with him and being rebuked for a lack of the proper authorizing documentation, exclaims, “’Sblood, thou’ll not stale without a warrant, shortly. Whit, give me a pen, ink and paper. I’ll draw him a warrant presently” (4.6.5-6). With this, Knockem takes a slip of paper, writes down the name “Adam Overdo,” and hands it to Trouble-All. Satisfied, Trouble-All proceeds to drink himself into a stupor. The scene raises an interesting problem, a problem not unlike Hieronimo’s difficulty in assessing the authenticity of Bel-Imperia’s letter. While the authenticating
apparatus of bureaucratic documents serves to identify the figure upon whose authority
the document is produced and circulated, this apparatus can easily be forged and passed
off as authentic to one who is not familiar with customary modes of identification. The
farther down the bureaucratic chain one goes the more tenuous the link to the initial
authorizing power becomes, and, as such, the easier it is to usurp that power to serve
one’s own purposes. Moreover, the play figures the desire for bureaucratic authorization
as the desire of a madman, whose hunger for writs and licenses renders him unable to
function in society.

While the documents in The Spanish Tragedy serve, for the most part, as
obstacles or puzzles which the characters of the play must solve, documents in
Bartholomew Fair are the means by which such problems may ultimately be resolved.
The play opens with the proctor John Littlewit composing a marriage license. From the
outset of the play, when Littlewit reads out the license, admiring his work, the license
holds the promise of a satisfactory comic resolution. However, the license proves to have
a less stable function and meaning than one might expect from a written, sealed
document. Locked inside a box for safe-keeping and carried around the fair by Wasp,
Littlewit’s servant, the license is reminiscent of the spectral pardon of The Spanish
Tragedy, especially when it turns out not to be in the box at the end of the play.
However, this document is not imaginary – it has been stolen and modified so that it
licenses a different marriage than originally intended. Bearing as it does all of its original

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7 For an interesting reading of the misuse of documents in the play as
representative of Jonson’s antitheatrical sentiments, see Richard Burt, “‘Licensed by
authenticating apparatus, the document is accepted as legitimate, despite the fact that all involved are perfectly aware that it has been forged.

The way in which these two wayward documents – the warrant and the license – are deployed in the play, underscore the paradoxical nature of Jonson’s satire of bureaucracy. As the tools of subordination and misrule, they offer a challenge to bureaucratic methods of enforcing power by calling into question society’s willingness to accept virtually any marker of authority, no matter how blatantly false. At the same time, though, it is only through the acceptance of the marriage license as legitimate that the play can reach the conclusion demanded by its comic form – a wedding. Thus, even as it undermines them, the play ultimately serves to reinforce the authority of bureaucratic figures and documents, representing them as necessary for the proper organization and control of society.

III
“The model of that Danish seal”: Feigning and Forging

This doubled representation of bureaucratic systems of communication, as simultaneously flawed and necessary, is, according to Derrida, inherent to all acts of absent authorization – those acts of authorization upon which bureaucratic systems are based. Derrida writes,

Effects of signature are the most ordinary thing in the world. The condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. (328)
Thus, the iterability of the signature, that which renders it effective, is also that which
compromises the guarantee of authenticity that it is meant to indicate. This is, of course,
a significant issue with regards to the proper functioning of a bureaucratic system, given
that the signature is, of the various types of authenticating apparatuses, the most directly
linked to the will of the authorizing power. That is, while seals and testimony require no
direct involvement from the official source of a bureaucratic document, the signature
must, ostensibly, be produced by the source him/herself. As Derrida points out, this is
not in fact the case. Given that its most basic structure depends on the ability of
individuals to authorize actions and communications in absentia, the bureaucratic system
must rely on this potentially unstable and paradoxical combination of singularity and
repeatability in order to function.

Nor was this potential problem unfamiliar to early modern writers on such
matters. Indeed, on October 7, 1621, King James issued A Proclamation against abuses
in preparing and preferring Billes and other Writings to his Majesties Signature after
“observing the inordinate libertie that hath beene taken, chiefly of late times, in
exhibiting to his Royall Signature” (1). Interestingly, in a moment reminiscent of Faunt’s
complaint about the growth of the Secretary’s office under Walsingham, the proclamation
expresses a desire to “abolish those abuses, which have of late yeeres crept into [the
king’s] service, and to reduce it to the ancient order and institution” (1). Like Faunt’s
“Discourse,” James’s proclamation is cautious about not discrediting the institution,
while simultaneously addressing a problem that is intrinsic to that very system—a
problem which is, in fact, so ingrained in the system that the proclamation goes on to
describe three discrete ways in which the bureaucratic process might be abused:
That no person or persons whatsoever (other than his Majesties owne ordinarie Officers, to whose places it appertaineth) doe at any time hereafter presume to intermeddle with the drawing, writing, or preparing for his Majesties Signature, of any Bill, Warrant, Letter, or other instrument or writing whatsoever […] : And that no person or persons […], presume to preferre to his Majestie to bee signed any such Bill, Warrant, Letter, or other instrument or writing, not drawen or allowed by such his Majesties ordinarie Officers, and by them signed and docqueted, in cases where the like instruments have heretofore beene used to be signed and docqueted: And that none of his Majesties owne Officers, do presume to draw or prepare for his Highnes Signature any Bill, Warrant, Letter, or other instrument or writing until they have received direction to draw the same by some signification of his Majesties owne Royall pleasure […]. (1)

Significantly, James’s signature is treated, in this proclamation, as being presently beyond his control. Somehow, the act of signing is no longer an expression of royal will, but is instead merely a mechanical process whose execution is a foregone conclusion once the documents have been drawn up. This is most evident in the final admonition in the above passage, that the king’s officers must be sure, before presenting anything to the king to be signed, to have received “some signification of his Majesties owne Royall pleasure,” as if the King’s signature were not just such a signification.  

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(1) The one notable exception to this is what was known as the “dry stamp,” a reproduction of the monarch’s signature in metal or wood that could be pressed into documents in order to “sign” them in the king’s absence. Use of the stamp, however, was tightly controlled and misuse of it would not have prompted this sort of universal proclamation. This is not to say that historians have not speculated about potential
even the king himself, by and through whose authority the bureaucracy functions, is
alienated through the repeated delegation of power and responsibility from his own
decision-making process. Interestingly, although the proclamation covers a number of
ways in which the system for the production of documents might be abused, it makes no
direct mention of forgery or of the improper appropriation of the king’s seal. This is
interesting, given that control of the royal seals was for years a vexed topic for both the
kings and queens of England and their advisors. Of course, as the expressed intention of
the proclamation is not to revolutionize the system, but rather to return it to its imagined
former state of purity, discussion of the fact that the very nature of a bureaucratic system
is to distance the king from “his” decisions would, clearly, be counterproductive.

The strange gap divulged in the proclamation between the formulation of the
king’s will and the expression thereof in the form of his signature is satirized in the figure
of Justice Overdo in *Bartholomew Fair*. Touched by Trouble-All’s zealous dedication to
his authority, Overdo determines to reward him in whatever way Trouble-All desires.
Unfortunately, he mistakes Quarlous, disguised as Trouble-All, for his overly loyal
subject. Thus, it is to Quarlous, and not to Trouble-All that he offers a reward:

\[
\text{JUSTICE: Do you want a house or meat, or drink, or clothes? Speak}
\]
\[
\text{whatsoever it is, it shall be supplied you, what want you?}
\]
\[
\text{QUARLOUS: Nothing but your warrant.}
\]

misuses of the stamp, especially as regards the final version of Henry VIII’s will, which
was “signed” after his death. For discussions of the stamp and of its use on Henry VIII’s
will, see Williams 23-26; Edwards 136-37; A. F. Pollard, “Letters and Papers of Henry
VIII,” *The English Historical Review*, 26: 102 (April 1911), 257-66; and E. W. Ives,
“Henry VIII’s Will – A Forensic Conundrum,” *The Historical Journal* 35 (1992), 779-
804.

9 See David Loades, *Tudor Government: The Structures of Authority in Tudor
JUSTICE: My warrant? For what?

QUARLOUS: To be gone, sir.

JUSTICE: Nay, I pray thee stay, I am serious, and have not many words, nor much time to exchange with thee; think what may do thee good.

QUARLOUS: your hand and seal will do me a great deal of good. (5.2.83-92)

In an effort to repay personal devotion, Overdo resorts, illicitly, to his public power, and hands Quarlos a blank sheet of paper, which he has signed, and to which he has affixed his seal. Overdo’s willingness to hand out a blank warrant to a madman serves as a warning of the sort of abuses against which James’s proclamation was written. Furthermore, Overdo seems to be just what Robert Cecil has in mind when he admonishes that a proper secretary should “deale lesse with other mens suites” (30). Ultimately, though, Overdo is not so much the type of figure against whom the proclamation warns as he is strikingly similar to the figure of the king who signs documents despite being apparently unaware of their contents. In this way, the play’s satire reaches across the range of bureaucratic posts, drawing attention to the dangers inherent in the delegation of authority, dangers that result from both the appointment of untrustworthy agents, and from an authority figure who is too far removed from the day-to-day functioning of the state.

10 Notably, Quarlos’s use of the phrase “hand and seal” exactly reproduces the wording of the 1597 Act for the punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds, and sturdie Beggers discussed on pages 27-28.
Significantly, Overdo shares with Hieronimo a difficulty in perceiving beyond outward forms, as Quarlous points out when he discovers himself to Overdo, stating, “I am mad, but from the gown outward” (5.6.59). As discussed above, the proper functioning of a bureaucratic system relies on those in its employ being able to properly “read” exteriors that have been specifically designed to thwart easy access and whose conventional nature renders them easily imitated. It is my contention that concern with the ability of others to conceal content and to feign different exteriors links early modern writings on administration with other early modern formulations of individual subjectivity.

The question of when a recognizably modern form of subjectivity begins to be expressed in English literature has been answered, and reanswered, by literary critics for decades. For scholars of early modern literature, an important catalyst to this debate is Francis Barker’s influential 1984 book, *The Tremulous Private Body*. In it, Barker argues that modern readings of Hamlet as possessing a modern sense of his own, secret, interiority are anachronistic, and that it is not until the latter half of the 17th century, in the work of diarists such as Samuel Pepys, that this concept truly takes hold. According to Barker, “this interiority remains, in *Hamlet*, gestural” (163), as Hamlet is unable adequately to express his own interiority except to inform others that it exists. Concentrating as it does on one brief passage in *Hamlet*, or, rather, on the lack of a passage in *Hamlet*, Barker’s argument is frustrating, to say the least. Following Barker, Catherine Belsey and Jonathan Dollimore continue to denounce readings of Hamlet as a proto-modern subject, arguing that the very concept of an autonomous subjectivity is
This avoids the question altogether, for, if there is no truly individuated subjectivity, Hamlet could not, surely, express it. Belsey and Dollimore, who shift the focus of their attack from what Hamlet does or doesn’t say to whether Hamlet is justified in saying (or not saying) what he does or doesn’t say, miss the point. That is, to denounce (and thus dismiss) early modern conceptions of self-constituted subjectivity as, in retrospect, false, is anachronistic at best. Furthermore, as John Lee points out, by using terms such as “subject,” “self,” and “identity” interchangeably, “Belsey and Dollimore dismiss the possibility of considering whether there are component areas within general identity, some of which might demonstrate a significantly higher degree of self-constituting agency than that possessed by overall identity” (89).

More recently, debate has tended to focus more specifically on concepts of interiority. Katherine Eisaman Maus, for instance, examines the gap between what she sees as a growing cultural sense of an interior subjectivity and the potential for the English language to express this interiority. Instead of searching for direct, satisfactory expressions of inwardness, Maus analyzes the “epistemological anxieties that gap generates,” and “the social practices that are devised to manage it” (2). While Maus’s willingness to read silence as more than merely evidence of a lack is a significant corrective to Barker’s reading of *Hamlet*, what is perhaps most important is her belief that, whether or not individual subjectivity is a bourgeois myth, the concept of the inscrutable, private subject is one which had a real and profound effect on the development of early modern English culture.

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As *Hamlet* has been the focal point of much of the debate about early subjectivity, it is appropriate that it links writings on early modern bureaucracy and early modern conceptions of individual subjectivity. Setting aside the much-debated scene in Act 1, Scene 2 of the play, in which Hamlet explicitly claims some sort of inscrutable interiority, I would like to point out a way in which the anxiety surrounding the inscrutability of the other is sublimated into a distinctly bureaucratic form in *Hamlet*. This occurs late in the play, when the concept of the feigned exterior, initially invoked by Hamlet’s claim to an interior, unknowable self, is made manifest in the form of a forged bureaucratic document.

Upon returning from his aborted voyage to England, Hamlet recounts to his friend Horatio his discovery of a document carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

> O royal knavery!—an exact command,
> Larded with many several sorts of reasons
> Importing Denmark’s health, and England’s, too,
> With ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,
> That on the supervise, no leisure bated,
> No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
> My head should be struck off. (5.2.20-26)

As a sealed document, the death warrant contains, to use Hamlet’s phrase, “that within which passeth show” (1.2.85), and “that within” the document is, after a fashion, Hamlet’s life. However, Hamlet is singularly able to control the contents of the document and sets to writing another version of the letter, replacing the original with his own. Horatio, apparently well versed in the bureaucratic apparatus of authenticating
documents, asks immediately, “How was this sealed?” (5.2.48). After all, such bureaucratic documents were worthless without a number of authenticating devices, including the signature, the testimony of the letter-carrier, and, finally, the royal seal. As Goldberg argues, the authority of the letter itself always needed “to be read in conjunction with […] these other modes of authentication” (234). The bureaucrat deals, for the most part, with letters composed by committee, letters whose authority is based not on a singular, attributable author, but on an overarching supervisory authority whose approval, as has been discussed above, must be marked mechanically, by seal, or anecdotally, by the letter carrier in order for it to be authoritative.

Hamlet has no concerns on this front, however, as he explains to Horatio:

Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.

I had my father’s signet in my purse,

Which was the model of that Danish seal;

Folded the writ up in the form of th’other,

Subscribed it, gave’t th’impression, placed it safely. (5.2.49-53)

And so, Hamlet, expert as he is in matters unseen, turns from feigning to forging, allowing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to vouch for the authenticity of their own death warrants. As such, they offer an explicit illustration of the warning that is implicit in James’s proclamation: for all intents and purposes, they bear a document which has been signed by the king, and yet the signature, or in this case its mechanical equivalent, cannot be read in and of itself as a “signification of his Majesties owne Royall pleasure.” Like Justice Overdo, Hamlet embodies, at this moment in the play, the potential for usurpation created by an increasingly decentred power structure and, more specifically, by the
unregulated distribution and improper control of the king’s seal. However, this scene also offers a portrait of the way in which bureaucratic secrecy transforms the concept of interiority, rendering content foreign even to those entrusted with it. That is, with this same document Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves unable to perceive the contents of the very secret that they bear.

The connection between concepts of interiority and the early modern bureaucracy does not end, however, with the secrecy of documents. The very way in which the early modern document was constructed offers a provocative parallel to the closed, secretive body. As L. C. Hector notes, the parchment used for bureaucratic documents was made from the dried, treated skin of various animals, and was always arranged in such a way that the inside of a sealed document, the side upon which the document was written, was the “flesh” or interior side of the skin, while the outside was the “hair” or exterior side (17-18). Thus, the document itself acts as a simulacrum of the body, concealing its content within a sheath of skin, whose exterior bears the markings of its status, its lineage, and its destination. This parallel was not lost on early modern writers on state administration, who repeatedly figure the body as text and the text as body. Furthermore, in figuring their bodies as vessels for the concealment of texts, these writers envision themselves as, like Hamlet, possessing a secret, unknowable, interior self. Interestingly, though, in these writings, the contents of this interior self often turn out not to have been authored by the possessor of the body, but by someone else entirely. For example, the admonition from the *Secretum Secretorum* that a good secretary must be “sly and wary, that no man see his privatest nether books” (83) imagines a hierarchy of interiorities,
privileging the secretary most capable of concealment, but places at the centre not the secretary’s own secrets but his master’s.

In his *Diary*, Samuel Pepys recounts a story about the visit of a royal messenger in the midst of the Civil War:

Among other at table, he told us a very handsome passage of the King’s sending him a message about holding out the town of Newarke, of which he was then governor for the King. This message he sent in a Slugg bullet, being writ in Cypher and wrapped up in lead and swallowed. So the messenger came to my Lord and told him he had a message from the King, but it was yet in his belly; so they did give him some physic, and out it came. (30)

Here, the metaphor of the bureaucratic transformation of the interior turned to text becomes fact. What is literally inside the messenger is the subject of investigation and of interpretation. Significantly, in this reformulation of the secretive self, the content of the body remains unintelligible even to its ostensible owner, as the message has been both encrypted and concealed within the “slugg bullet” before the messenger incorporates it. Thus alienating the self even from its own secret interior, administrative structures of power and knowledge recreate, within the individual body, those hierarchies of secrecy and access through which the state functions.
Chapter Four: The Eyes of the State

For (alas) as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men’s ears; we see with other men’s eyes; a foolish constable, or a sleepy watchman, is all our information.

Jonson, Bartholomew Fair

What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light.

Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing

In “A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor and Principall Secretarie to her Ma[jes]tie” (1592), Robert Beale writes,

A Secretarie must have a speciall Cabinett, whereof he is himselfe to keepe the Keye, for his signets, Ciphers and secret Intelligences, distinguishing the boxes or tills rather by letters than by the names of the Countryes or places, keepinge that only unto himselfe, for the names may inflame a desire to come by such thinges. (428)

The “cabinett” evokes in Beale’s work a similar sense of containment and impenetrability as the closet does in The English Secretary. It is, as is the closet in Day’s work, a space constructed for the containment of secrets and for the facilitation of the exchange of information. There are, however, subtle differences between the two. Whereas Day’s closet was, as Alan Stewart points out, a space in which two men worked in cooperation, the cabinet is a space to which only the secretary may have access. Furthermore, while the secretary’s closet in Day’s formulation is a private space both as the result of its location in the inner recesses of his master’s home and in terms of its ability to be locked,

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1 *Bartholomew Fair* 2.1.24-27
2 *Much Ado* 5.1.231-233
Beale’s cabinet is, on the surface, at least, notably public—hence the need to encrypt the labels of the “boxes or tills” in order to hide their contents, whether or not those contents are, themselves, encrypted. Indeed, the degree of privacy of the contents of the cabinet or closet seems to be inversely proportional to the degree to which it is hidden from view.

Beale’s cabinet is also notable for what it contains. Though belied by its centrality and its limited (and limiting) physical shape, the cabinet is a medium through which the secretary’s reach extends well beyond the space in which he works. Within the cabinet are the tools with which the secretary organizes and controls his intelligencers, upon whose surveillance of both foreign and domestic targets the secretary relies heavily to aid him in his administration of the state. Understanding the cabinet in terms of both its enabling and its restricting of the acquisition of knowledge, Beale’s treatise offers insight into the complex nature of the state’s management of its agents. That the contents of the cabinet had to be protected even from the prying eyes of the staff of the secretary’s office is indicative of the degree to which the ability both to gain access to and to divulge information was carefully controlled.

This chapter investigates the way in which the nature and structure of state surveillance is imagined in early modern drama. First, I will investigate Jonson’s representation, in Bartholomew Fair, of connections between the desire to know and the desire to punish what Justice Adam Overdo refers to obsessively as “enormities,” or transgressions against both the law and morality. Then, continuing my discussion of Overdo, I will examine the way in which the relative autonomy of individual agents of the government poses a problem for the state. The problem of autonomy, and its threat to the state’s desire to control the collection and dissemination of information, raises, once
again, a question that has surfaced repeatedly, whether implicitly or explicitly, through the first two chapters of this dissertation: namely, who should be entrusted by the state to act on its behalf, and to what extent should they be allowed to act autonomously? The desire of its agents to see everything becomes a problem for the state because, as the example of Adam Overdo demonstrates, often merely seeing is not sufficient. The chapter will end with an analysis of the way in which Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* undertakes to answer these questions, providing a model of disciplinary surveillance that, for all of its idiosyncrasies, offers a pragmatic corrective to the Crown’s desire to view the realm panoptically. The play also attempts to address the problem of how to manage a system in which the interests of the state are represented by people whose own interests may not always be perfectly in concert with those of their employer. Furthermore, the final sections of the chapter will argue that these works provide a model of justice that complicates one of the dominant paradigms of the study of early modern drama and culture, Michel Foucault’s concept of the “Spectacle of the Scaffold” and its role in the administration of justice and of society as a whole as he delineates it in *Discipline and Punish*.

I

**Bartholomew Fair: Justice Overdone**

In his first appearance onstage in *Bartholomew Fair*, Justice Adam Overdo soliloquizes on his experience of the nature of bureaucratic labour. Bemoaning the

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3 Though the mention of panopticism here cannot help but evoke Foucault’s analysis of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century disciplinary structures in *Discipline and Punish*, what is intended by the term here is, more straightforwardly, a desire to see all and thus to control it in this way. In this context, this desire is not explicitly linked, as it is in Foucault and in Jeremy Bentham’s 1791 *Panopticon Papers*, to the desire “to induce […] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (CITE).
mediated nature of his work, he complains, “For (alas) as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men’s ears; we see with other men’s eyes; a foolish constable, or a sleepy watchman, is all our information” (2.1.24-27). The world around him comes to Overdo at a remove, reported as it is through the testimony of, to his mind, uniformly unreliable men. In remedy thereof, Overdo disguises himself in order that he might undertake some surveillance of his own. In doing so, he models himself on “a worthy worshipful man, sometime a capital member of this city”\(^4\) (2.1.11-12), who disguises himself in order to circulate unseen in the city:

and what would he do in all these shapes? Marry, go you into every alehouse, and down into every cellar; measure the length of puddings, take the gauge of black pots, and cans, aye, and custards with a stick; and their circumference with a thread; weight the loaves of bread on his middle-finger. (2.1.15-20)

Overdo’s desire to catalogue, like his role model, the city of London in its entirety, and in painstaking detail, parallels the work of the state bureaucracy under Francis Walsingham and William and Robert Cecil. As Beale writes in his “Treatise,”

A Secretarie must likewise have the booke of Ortelius’ Mapps, a booke of the Mappes of England, w[ith] a particular note of the divisions of the shires into Hundreds, Lathes, Wappentaes, and what Noblemen, Gentlemen and others be residing in every one of them; what cities, Burrows, Markett Townes, Villages; and also a good descripc[i]on of the

\(^4\) In his notes to the play, G. A. Wilkes identifies this figure with Thomas Hayes, Lord Mayor of London in 1614.
Realm of Irelande, a note of the Noblemen and surnames English or Irish of their septs, Enraghes, Galloglasses, Kerns and followers, and if anie other plotts or mapps come into his handes, let them be kept safelie. (428-29)

The classificatory urge extends beyond maps, however, and Beale goes on to describe a number of categories of information “that a Secretarie should have digested into X or XII severall booke,” which cover a wide range of topics, from “the examinac[i]ons of Priests and Traitors” to “the rates of victuals to serve either by sea or lande” (429). Even the form of Beale’s list is revealing. Though it begins in an orderly fashion, numbering each category of intelligence separately, once the list exceeds ten discrete subdivisions of knowledge (presumably one for each of the ten books required), the requisite knowledge of the secretary continues to grow. The second half of the instruction – the portion that follows the original ten categories – is half again as long as the “official” list.

This appetite for information, as well as the concomitant desire to classify and sort that information, is, as Swen Voekel argues, characteristic of the development of the nation-state, “whose gaze looked inwards, over a firmly demarcated national territory to be described, anatomized and controlled” (1). Overdo performs a similar function, both through his desire to tally and through his cataloguing, over the course of the play, the various “enormities” that he observes and records in his black book. Indeed, just as Beale’s list links discipline (“the examinac[i]ons of Priests and Traitors”) and inventory (“the rates of victuals”), so too does Overdo’s desire to ferret out iniquity among the populace inform his interest in the enumeration of the contents of alehouses and cellars. As the passage continues, the implicit disciplinarity of this surveillance becomes explicit,
as the contents of the alehouses and cellars are confiscated, and Overdo’s role model administrator “break[s] the pots, and burn[s] the cans himself” (21-22). Thus the administrative will to know is shown to be intrinsically a will to control.\(^5\) Rather than entrust his subordinates with the task of gathering intelligence, Overdo, in the mould of the “worthy, worshipful man,” sets out, over the course of the play, to serve as his own intelligencer and to make his “own discoveries” (2.1.35-36). Overdo’s decision to undertake surveillance himself, rather than to delegate the duty to others, which he justifies by denouncing his underlings as “a foolish constable, or a sleepy watchman,” is, however, problematic.\(^6\)

In his soliloquy, Overdo presents himself – somewhat absurdly – as someone who seems to be the perfect type of the self-abnegating public servant, whose willingness to subordinate all personal connections to the needs of the state is indicated by his reference to himself as “Junius Brutus” (2.1.41). The connection to Junius Brutus is apparent in Overdo’s adoption of the guise of a fool; even more telling, though, is the fact that Brutus was known for having sentenced his two sons to death, an association which would not

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\(^5\) In his discussion of the function of surveillance in the works of Michel de Montaigne, John Archer writes, “Montaigne claims that if given a chance he would use it to speak boldly to his sovereign and ‘watch over [contrerrolé] his conduct’” (19). The passage is significant for the homophonic link that Montaigne makes between surveillance and control, demonstrating that the two concepts were already understood as intrinsically connected in the early modern period.

\(^6\) Overdo’s problematic approach to law enforcement is a part of what Ian McAdam calls “Jonson’s exploration of the dialectic of excessive and insufficient law in the play” (418). Though McAdams’s analysis concentrates for the most part on Jonson’s satire of religion, his account of the play complements mine. John Creaser further notes that Overdo is simply one of a number of problematic authority figures in the play. He writes, “[These figures] are pretenders to authority rather than representatives of it. The standards expected of judge, preacher, and teacher are the norms by which we can perceive how far they fall short: in this turn of the alternating current of irony, orthodox sources of authority are not undermined but reaffirmed” (182).
have been lost on Overdo, who repeatedly foregrounds his classical education. This
classical education, expressed most obviously through Overdo’s penchant for Stoicism,
dovetails neatly with his desire to mete out dispassionate justice, offering him a
philosophical framework and cultural tradition by which to justify his ostensibly
impersonal scourge of the “enormities” of the Fair. However, as Geoffrey Aggeler notes,
in the character of Justice Overdo,

Jonson represents comically one of the central paradoxes of Stoicism. On
the one hand, there is the injunction to withdraw from the external world
into a detached inner self and maintain *apatheia*. On the other, one is
urged to perform virtuously like a good actor on a stage that is the world.

(438)

Aggeler argues that Overdo’s stoic detachment, which licenses his strict administration of
Justice, is a problem that the play seeks to solve. He claims that

In *Bartholomew Fair* only characters who refuse to accept the Fair are
punished. […] But Overdo makes more progress than either of the other
two enemies of the Fair […]. Unhampered by inhumane Stoic principles
and assumptions, his moral vision has become as compassionate and
accepting as that of his creator. (441)

It is tempting to read Aggeler’s comments as ironic, especially given his invocation of a
Ben Jonson who is difficult to reconcile with the popular image of him as a caustic
satirist and a quarrelsome, twice-jailed dueller. Aggeler’s further claim that “The only
characters who are truly punished in *Bartholomew Fair* are the targets of satire” (441) is
also somewhat difficult to credit, especially given his own inability to identify those
targets definitively. Overdo’s redemptive transformation is likewise difficult to prove unequivocally. When, at the end of the play, Justice Overdo extends his invitation to supper, it is a gesture not of magnanimity, but of shame. The gesture does not originate with him, but rather with Quarlous, who instructs Overdo to “forget your other name of Overdo, and invite us all to supper” (5.6.90-91). Overdo’s shame initially stems from his wife’s apparent utter moral dissolution. As her final action in the play, Mistress Overdo interrupts her husband’s condemnation of what he perceives as the many “enormities” of the Fair by vomiting onstage and calling out, “Oh lend me a basin, I am sick, I am sick; where’s Master Overdo? Bridget, call hither my Adam” (5.6.62-63). At the moment that this occurs, Overdo, in the last of his many mistakings in the play, has mistaken his wife for a drunken prostitute and is in the process of denouncing her, among others. Upon being forced to recognize his wife, Justice Overdo “is silenced” (5.6.sd 64), and remains so until his prompted invitation to supper thirty-seven lines later.

The scene recalls an earlier episode in which Overdo has sworn to become more merciful. When, while in his fool’s disguise, he is placed in the stocks, Overdo vows, “I will be more tender hereafter. I see compassion may become a Justice, though it be a weakness, I confess; and nearer a vice than a virtue” (4.1.72-74). As in the final scene of the play, this decision is prompted by Overdo’s being forced to realize his own place within society. In this case, it is the watchmen Haggis and Bristle who reveal to the disguised Overdo the way in which he is perceived, namely as “a very parantory person” and “a severe justicer” (4.1.60, 61). However, the change in his behaviour occasioned by this bruising of his ego, by the recognition that he is disliked not only by those who commit enormities, but also by his colleagues in law enforcement, is only temporary.
When he appears onstage, in a new disguise, in the fifth act, Overdo has rediscovered his zeal for executing his disciplinary authority:

This later disguise I have borrowed of a porter shall carry me out to all my great and good ends; which however interrupted, were never destroyed in me: neither is the hour of my severity yet come, to reveal myself, wherein cloud-like, I will break out in rain and hail, lightning and thunder, upon the head of enormity. (5.2.1-5)

The mercy promised earlier has all but disappeared, replaced by a renewed desire to punish those who transgress against the social order as he understands it. It has not disappeared totally, as Overdo maintains a certain tenderness for the madman Trouble-All, which results, as discussed in the previous chapter, in his mistakenly offering a blank warrant, signed and sealed, to Quarlous. These two impulses are not, however, contradictory. Overdo’s affection for Trouble-All stems from an encounter between Trouble-All and the Watch, in which Trouble-All states, “If you have Justice Overdo’s warrant, ’tis well: you are safe; that is the warrant of warrants. I’ll not give this button for any man’s warrant else” (4.1.16-18). For Overdo, this monomaniacal dedication to his authority is not a marker of madness, but rather an indication that Trouble-All is “a sober and discreet person” (4.1.23). The desire to compensate Trouble-All for his having been dismissed from his position as an officer at the previous year’s Court of Piepowders – an act which seems utterly justified by Trouble-All’s mental state – stems from a desire to reward what Overdo sees as a proper respect for the proper (which is to say his) authority. In the same manner, Overdo’s repentance of his repentance is simply a return to the self-love which has characterized him through the first four acts of the play. This
return is signalled by his announcement of his changed world view in the form of a Latin aphorism of the sort by which he characterizes himself throughout the earlier acts: “Ad correctionem, non ad destructionem; Ad aedificandum, non ad diruendum [For correction, not for destruction; for building up, not for tearing down]” (5.6.102-02).

Notably, when Overdo determines to return to his zealous pursuit of “enormity” he does so not, as he has done previously, “in justice’ name, and the King’s” (2.1.1, 41-42), but rather in aid of “all my great and good ends” (5.2.2). In essence, Overdo becomes a sort of rogue agent, acting on the state’s authority, but not necessarily in the state’s interest. In so doing, he becomes as much of a problem as any of those that he seeks to correct.

II

Policing the Police

In Invisible Power, Alan Haynes relates the story of Richard Topcliffe, who served as the employee of William Cecil in the 1580s. Though he eventually came to be known for his affinity for torture, it was not until the end of the decade that Topcliffe’s name first appeared on a warrant, and not until after Walsingham’s death in 1590 that he began to “flourish” as a torturer, as Haynes puts it (52-53). In many ways, Topcliffe’s biography reads like that of a typical Elizabethan state servant. He was literate and of a distant aristocratic pedigree of the sort that allowed for a decent education, but little in the way of financial support. However, Frank Brownlow offers an alternative account of the early years of Topcliffe’s employment:

At the very outset of Elizabeth’s reign, as [Topcliffe] told Robert Cecil in one of his later letters, Topcliffe entered the Queen’s service, though in what capacity is not clear. […] In a Court of Requests suit of about 1589, however, Topcliffe is described as “Esquire for the Body to her Majesty”
[...]. As esquire for the body, an officer whose chief business, we are told in Edward IV’s Black Book, was “many secrets”, Topcliffe first stepped on to the historical stage carrying letters between Elizabeth and Leicester.

(163)

Brownlow’s account of Topcliffe is intended as a corrective to what he sees as the failure of most critics of early modern culture to acknowledge the brutal suppression of English Catholics during Elizabeth’s reign. Taking issue with interpretations of early modern documentation of torture in works such as John H. Langbein’s *Torture and the Law of Proof* (1977), Brownlow’s estimate of the number of “cases of acute torture or the threat of it” more than doubles Langbein’s, from eighty-one “to between about 165 and 175 cases” (162-63). Brownlow goes on to claim that “Of those cases Richard Topcliffe was involved in at least about fifty between 1582 and 1599” (163).

As a torturer, Topcliffe was, it seems, without equal. As Haynes notes, “Once he maltreated a suspect Scottish thief with such ferocity that the man’s indignant employer told the lord mayor ‘that cannibals would not use any as his servant was used’” (53). The evocation of cannibals here marks Topcliffe as being unsuited to existence within society, as an aberration from acceptability. In so doing, the suspected thief’s employer misunderstands the violence done to his employee as originating with Topcliffe. On the contrary, Topcliffe’s actions were carefully monitored and controlled by the state, and he was himself imprisoned on at least one occasion, for his overzealous torture of the Jesuit Robert Southwell (Haynes 52).  

The absence of any such censure in the case of the  

7 Citing a letter from Topcliffe to Elizabeth, Brownlow argues that the torture was authorized by the Queen herself. That he was subsequently sanctioned by the state is thus
suspected thief indicates one of two possibilities. Either the Privy Council, under whose authority Topcliffe worked, was not only aware of his actions but sanctioned them as a necessary aspect of social control or, if the torture was not directly authorized, the subsequent silence on the matter demonstrates tacit approval of Topcliffe’s methods of interrogation. Either way, the association of Topcliffe with the figure of the cannibal is not only misguided, but is in fact misleading. Though the violence that Topcliffe inflicts upon the bodies of his subjects may appear savage, it is quite the opposite; it is the violence of careful, organized state authority.\footnote{For another discussion of connections between the “cannibal” and state torture, see Curtis Breight “‘Treason doth never prosper’: The Tempest and the Discourse of Treason.” Shakespeare Quarterly 41 (1990): 1-28.}

The complex dynamics at play in controlling agents of state violence surface in Topcliffe, who was jailed not only following the Southwell incident but on another occasion as well. Topcliffe, employed by the state to discover secrets, through means both violent and otherwise, was also apparently imprisoned for “maligning privy councillors” – the substance of which maligning seems to have been the disclosure of “Thomas Fitzherbert’s attempt in 1595 to bribe him to eliminate two relatives” (Haynes 53). Topcliffe, charged with the discovery of enemy plots against the Queen in his role as interrogator, was charged criminally for the disclosure of a plot that seems to have differed only in terms of who was plotting and against whom. That is, what would be intelligence if extracted by Topcliffe in the process of an interrogation becomes “maligning” when offered unsolicited. Apparently, the official discoverer of others’ secrets was expected, simultaneously, to maintain the sanctity of his own secrets. This
expectation demonstrates the tenuous position of employees of the state, whose actions, though sanctioned by and in the service of the state, were nevertheless subject to the very forms of social control of which they themselves were a part, and whose position as extractors and divulgers of secrets granted them a degree of testimonial authority that, uncontrolled, constituted a threat to state hegemony.

Similarly, Robert Poley, immortalized in a line in Ben Jonson’s “Inviting a Friend to Supper” (“And we will have no Pooly, or Parrot by”), appears to have worked on either side of the bars in the Tower of London, and, indeed, on both sides at once. Poley is best known to literary historians for attending, presumably as Robert Cecil’s agent, a meeting with Christopher Marlowe on May 30, 1593 which ended in Marlowe’s death. He was also an integral part of Francis Walshingham’s foiling of the Babington plot to assassinate the queen, serving as Walshingham’s agent in the surveillance of Anthony Babington himself in the Spring and Summer of 1586. His legal fortunes, however, seem to have fluctuated greatly. Ethel Seaton notes that Poley was a prisoner in the Tower in the 1580s, though he “was still being used for spying, and for worming secrets out of suspects, and was acting under instructions” (148). Like Topcliffe, Poley’s legal problems seem to have come from a certain lack of discretion, as the State Papers record him as being deposed, after his release, in an inquiry “touching certain lewd speeches uttered by Rob’t. Polley” (qtd in Seaton 148). According to Seaton, these “lewd speeches” were probably slanders against Walsingham, whose agent Poley had been in prison.

These two extractors of secrets, Topcliffe the torturer and Poley the spy, mark a border between the desire of Elizabeth and her councillors to uncover and the need to

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9 For fuller accounts of Poley’s roles in the death of Marlowe and the capture of Babington, see Haynes 99-102 and Plowden 98-103, respectively.
suppress information. In so doing, they draw attention to the doubled function of the English intelligencer. A modern reader might understand the duality as the related processes of intelligence and counter-intelligence. The latter term, however, presupposes an intelligence network against which the intelligencer is working. While there is no question that state spies had antagonistic counterparts of both foreign and domestic extraction, the censures of Topcliffe and Poley are in no way indicative of counter-espionage. Instead, they demonstrate the way in which the intelligencer stands at the threshold between the two halves of another binary, which is cast by the state as definitively oppositional, between the state and its subjects. Thus the state’s desire to know, the need to see inside, is symptomatic of a larger desire to control the circulation of information, which is itself a reflection of a vision, fostered and promulgated by the state bureaucracy, of society as constituted by information. Interiority, slander, marriage, treason, each is stripped of its intangibility and transformed to text, text which may then be classified objectively as either in concert with or in opposition to the desires of the state.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the problem of who is entrusted by the state to act and to speak on its behalf surfaces repeatedly in contemporary discussions of the nature of bureaucratic service such as the Secretum Secretorum, and Cecil’s and Faunt’s treatises on the role of the Principal Secretary. It is a concern which arises with notable frequency in early modern drama as well. Like Topcliffe and Poley, Bosola, Ferdinand’s discoverer of secrets in John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi, is problematically duplicitous, seeming to change allegiances regularly; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are
comically, and fatally, inept in their investigations of Hamlet; and Sejanus, of course, places his own concerns above those of the state.

Like many of the above plays, Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* has, among its characters, a public servant whose abuses his position of authority: Angelo, the Duke’s replacement. What makes the play significant for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that it takes as its explicit subject the proper organization and implementation of state authority and, more importantly, the policing of this authority through covert surveillance. It opens with a delegation of power from the Duke to Angelo, and it is resolved both through the reclaiming of that power by the Duke and through the Duke’s newly rejuvenated appetite for the exercising of his authority. The play follows the disguised Duke in his attempts, as Katharine Eisaman Maus puts it, “to root out” “the sexual ‘crimes’” of Vienna (160). The phrase “root out” here is evocative of the Duke’s desire both to eliminate sexual crime and to bring it to light. It is a play concerned with the processes of exposing sin, processes that are undeniably gendered and that Elizabeth Hanson further argues are inextricably bound up with patriarchal formations of power (60-74). Though the Duke and his surrogate, Angelo, are eminently concerned with the uncovering of iniquity and with the laying bare of secrets, there is an interesting moment in the play in which an unwelcome “secret” is divulged, a moment that reveals a hierarchy of revelatory authority which must be policed in the cause of maintaining social order.

Speech acts of employees of the state gain authority from the employees’ privileged positions within the state hierarchy. As such these employees must be carefully monitored, lest their speech be understood as authoritative, when it is in fact in
contravention of state policy or intention. Consider, for instance, Lucio, *Measure for Measure*’s “fantastic,” as he is called in the list of “Persons of the Play” (Greenblatt et al 2209). Lucio speaks of the Duke in terms which are unquestionably slanderous:

**DUKE** I never heard the absent Duke much detected for women; he was not inclined that way.

**LUCIO** O sir, you are deceived.

**DUKE** ‘Tis not possible.

**LUCIO** Who, not the Duke? Yes, your beggar of fifty; and his use was to put a ducat in her clack-dish. The Duke had crochets in him. He would be drunk too, that let me inform you. (3.1.368-70).

Not only is the Duke drunken and lecherous, according to Lucio, but he is also “A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow” (3.1.379). Rather than speaking surreptitiously, as one might expect someone attacking such a powerful figure to do, Lucio slanders the Duke with impunity, authorizing his attack on the supposedly absent Duke by invoking a privileged status: “Sir, I was an inward of his” (3.1.372). Modern editions usually gloss “inward” simply as a synonym for “intimate.” In fact, the provocatively titled “inward” was also a sort of personal secretary. This reading of Lucio’s statement is further supported by Lucio’s invocation of secretarial secrecy following his self-identification as “inward”:

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11 See, for example, Florence Evans, who writes, “In 1569 one William Allington was described as being an ‘inward man’ with Cecil ‘in the affairs of his office’” (157).
A shy fellow was the Duke,
and I believe I know the cause of his withdrawing.

What, I prithee, might be the cause?

No, pardon, ’tis a secret must be locked within the teeth
and the lips. (3.1.373-76)

Read in this way, the passage presents Lucio as claiming not the authority of a friend, or
an intimate, but that of an employee of the state. In doing so, he attempts to cast himself
and his statements as unimpeachable. The irony of this ploy is all too apparent to the
audience, who are, of course, aware that Lucio’s slanders are communicated to the very
man on whose authority he claims to speak. Furthermore, that Lucio is speaking, albeit
unwittingly, to the Duke serves to highlight the contingent nature of the authority to
which he lays claim.

In discussions of the Duke’s disguised surveillance of his subjects in Measure for
Measure, critics have attempted to understand the Duke’s decision to disguise himself as
a friar in various ways. In “Transgression and Surveillance in Measure for Measure,”
Jonathan Dollimore connects the disguise to contemporary debates “over the
‘Machiavellian’ proposition that religion was a form of ideological control which worked
in terms of internalised submission” (81). That is, religion serves, in Dollimore’s
formulation, as a supplement to state controls over externally verifiable acts. However,
I would argue that a state official, disguised as a Catholic, who wanders around

12 Peter Lake argues, in “Ministers, Magistrates and the Production of ‘Order’ in
Measure for Measure,” that the Duke’s disguise is one of a number of ways that the play
“suggests a number of via medias between mercy and justice (both human and divine)
[...], between the different but complementary domains of the minister and the
magistrate,” among others (180).
investigating and who solicits potentially treasonous statements from citizens would resonate in a far less theoretical way for an audience in seventeenth-century London.

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had seen a number of Catholic plots, both real and imagined, foiled through their infiltration by intelligencers in the employ of the Crown, and, more specifically, the various Secretaries of State. Robert Persons (or Parsons), Edmund Campion, Anthony Babington, along with contrivers of numerous other plots, some real, some less convincingly so, had all fallen prey to agents of the state posing as Catholic sympathizers. All had, furthermore, been made very public examples of the extensive reach of state power in England. In this context, the Duke is reminiscent of the possessor of another, more earthly, ubiquitous gaze, Francis Walsingham, whose seeming omniscience was achieved through his maintenance of extensive intelligence networks. As Alison Plowden writes, “it would probably be no exaggeration to say that very little went on in Catholic circles, either at home or abroad during the 1570s and 1580s which did not, sooner or later, come to the notice of Francis Walsingham’s office” (55). Travelling among his erstwhile subjects, the Duke gathers information in the service of an authority which he formerly held and will hold again. In this way the Duke, serving as his own agent, collapses the metonymic relationship between intelligencer to sovereign.

That is, the discovery of a state agent among conspirators is akin to the discovery of the sovereign him- or herself. This is not to say, however, that the two are identical. In an ideal bureaucratic state, in the strictest Platonic sense of the word ‘ideal,’ the state representative would indeed be a perfect representative of the sovereign. This was not, of course, the case, and the control of state agents necessitated a certain vigilance. Robert
Beale, aware of the need for such vigilance, warns prospective Principal Secretaries to “take heede they deale not double w[i]th you and abuse you w[i]th toyes and matters of their owne invenc[i]on” (437). Therein lay the problem with the state’s desire to “see” itself in its entirety, to possess the Duke’s ubiquitous gaze: such a gaze was necessarily predicated on the accurate, truthful testimony of a large number of men whose own devotion to the state was at times suspect. In essence, the Duke’s personal surveillance of his subjects is an impossible solution to an insoluble problem and is ultimately effective only as a metaphor for the state’s desire to see and know all.

III
Surveillance Central

The pastoral world of Leonato’s home in *Much Ado About Nothing* is set, as are the green spaces in other of Shakespeare’s comedies, in juxtaposition, both literal and figurative, to a “real” world of politics, crime and, in the case of *Much Ado*, war. In the safe space of the play, armed conflict is replaced by verbal warfare and martial concerns are supplanted by marital ones. The play works doubly to establish the distinction between inside and outside Leonato’s estate. That is, Leonato’s home offers both a respite from battle and protection from a world outside of its walls that is characterized entirely as disciplinary. There is not a character outside the walls who is not either employed by the state to enforce its authority or subject to that enforcement. If the outside, the implication seems to be, is so characterized, then the inside must be its logical antithesis, a world of natural order that has no need of the apparatus of state authority in order to function.

In general, criticism of the play has reinforced the view that *Much Ado About Nothing* is not a political play. As Marta Straznicky writes, “while *Measure for Measure*
and *The Tempest* have received their due share of political criticism, most of the other comedies, and especially the Elizabethan ones, have gone practically unnoticed” (141). While Straznicky’s article “Shakespeare and the Government of Comedy: *Much Ado About Nothing*” offers a corrective to this trend, it is a corrective which nevertheless partakes of the same understanding of the play, that is, that it is a play unconcerned with practical matters of political rule. I would argue, however, that virtually every facet of its plot is inflected with political concerns. This is not simply to say that the play concerns itself, as Straznicky rightly observes, with the working out of power relations, but rather to assert that *Much Ado About Nothing* is a play that is as much concerned with matters pertaining to the functioning of the state as either of Shakespeare’s “political” comedies.

The divide between inside and outside, pastoral and urban, love and politics is flawed from the outset, for the simple reason that Leonato is Governor of Messina and Don Pedro is Prince of Aragon. Neither would be in the position which they are in, that is, with Don Pedro a guest at Leonato’s home, without the status granted them by their respective positions. And so, from its inception, the inside/outside duality is collapsed and the ostensibly discrete worlds of the play are inextricably linked. The question arises, then, as to how deeply the similarities between Leonato’s household and the state of Messina run.

The first act is full of references to, and representations of, instances of careful observation and intelligence-gathering. As soon as the initial greetings and introductions are concluded, and Claudio and Benedick find themselves alone on stage, Claudio asks Benedick, “didst thou note the daughter of Signor Leonato?” (1.1.130-31). Benedick’s response, typical of his often flippant wordplay, is to split linguistic hairs: “I noted her
not, but I looked on her” (1.1.132). This teasing of Claudio, which draws a distinction between Claudio’s increasingly obvious attraction to Hero and Benedick’s own performance of disinterest, also marks a major concern of the play, the distinction between innocent “looking” and deliberate “noting,” that is, looking with the intention of gathering information, which, as many critics have observed, is one of the dominant tools of plot advancement in the play.\textsuperscript{13} This is not to say that Benedick, despite his self-representation as a disinterested observer, is not engaged in intelligence-gathering of his own. In fact, the very conversation in which Benedick characterizes himself as a “looker” rather than a “noter” provides Benedick with information that he relays to Don Pedro at the first opportunity. Upon Don Pedro’s return to the scene, he and Benedick have the following conversation:

\begin{verbatim}
DON PEDRO What secret hath held you here that you followed not to Leonato’s?
BENEDICK I would your grace would constrain me to tell.
DON PEDRO I charge thee on thy allegiance.
BENEDICK You hear, Count Claudio? I can be secret as a dumb man, I would have you think so. But on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance! He is in love. (1.1.165-71)
\end{verbatim}

Repeatedly in this exchange the two men return to the language of intelligence-gathering. Don Pedro’s initial characterization of Benedick and Claudio’s reason for lagging behind

\textsuperscript{13} The pun on the word “noting” in the title of the play, and the centrality of the concept of noting to the play as a whole were first examined in detail by Paul A. Jorgensen in “Much Ado About Nothing,” Shakespeare Quarterly 5 (1954): 287-95; they have since become, as Straznicky notes, “something of a commonplace” in criticism of the play (167 n. 41).
as a “secret,” though no desire for secrecy has been hinted at by either man,

simultaneously characterizes his interest as interrogative and asserts his right to

knowledge based on his sovereignty. Benedick picks up on Don Pedro’s shift to the

language of state, and responds not, as he is prone to do in most of the play, as a free-

speaking companion, but instead as a subordinate, awaiting, indeed requesting, Don

Pedro’s order to disclose Claudio’s secret. Forced (albeit by request) to choose between

fellowship and fealty, Benedick chooses his allegiance to his lord over his allegiance to

his friend, a minor betrayal that has been foreshadowed by Beatrice’s comment that

Benedick “wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat” (1.1.60-61).

The way in which Benedick phrases his apology to Claudio for this betrayal of

confidence is evocatively ambiguous; rather than an assertion of truth, Benedick’s

apology is an expression of desire: “I would have you think so.” The phrase asserts

Benedick’s desire to maintain his role as the trusted recipient of secret information, while

assiduously avoiding any explicit declaration of trustworthiness. Soon after, Benedick,

by swearing “by [his] two faiths and troths” (1.1.184), picks up on his own inability to

dedicate himself fully to his friend as he satirizes his own duplicity, a duplicity which is,

as Hanson claims, inherent to acts of bureaucratic standing-in (64-65) of which, I would

argue, intelligence-gathering is one type. Though the exchange between Benedick and

Don Pedro is clearly parodic, the humour is not derived from the performance of the

power relations between the two men, a claim supported by the fact that the play closes

with a non-humorous performance of those same relations when Benedick reclaims the

role of interrogator-torturer in promising to “devise […] brave punishments” for the
traitorous Don John (5.4.121-22). Rather, the humour lies in the turning of Claudio’s
desire, ostensibly a private, innocuous thing, into the subject of state investigation.

Claudio’s newly discovered affection for Hero is, in fact, the subject of much
intelligence gathering in the first act. In the following scene, Antonio informs his brother
Leonato of “strange news” (1.2.4) about which he has just become aware:

The Prince and Count Clau-
dio, walking in a thick-pleached alley in mine orchard, were
thus much overheard by a man of mine: the Prince discovered
to Claudio that he loved my niece, your daughter, and meant
to acknowledge it this night in a dance […]. (1.2.7-11)

Upon hearing the “news,” Leonato asks, quite rightly, given the inaccuracy of the report,
“Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?” (1.2.14). This well-advised sensitivity to the
importance of the source of the information is, however, futile, as Antonio immediately
vouches for the trustworthiness of his intelligencer, calling him “A good sharp fellow”
(1.2.15). The scene then ends inconclusively, with Leonato determining to “hold it as a
dream till it appear itself” (1.2.17). The scene is striking both for its brevity (it is only 23
lines long) and for the fact that the unnamed servant’s mistake is in effect a dead end
plot-wise, resurfacing only briefly in Leonato’s instruction to Hero regarding Don Pedro:
“If the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer” (2.1.55-56). This scene
takes on further significance, however, when read in the context of the scene which
follows it.

In the third and final scene of Act One, the audience is presented with a familiar
interchange, as Borachio announces to Don John, “I came yonder from a great supper.
The Prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonato, and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage” (1.3.34-36). Notably, the language used by Borachio is no longer the language of gossip, as it had been in the conversation between Leonato and Antonio. Here, “strange news” is transformed into “intelligence,” demonstrating Borachio’s awareness of the potential political capital that the knowledge bears. Furthermore, it explicitly links the accrual of knowledge with deliberate intelligence gathering, as Borachio has infiltrated Leonato’s home by being “entertained for a perfumer” (1.3.46), and then deliberately hidden himself in order to overhear the Prince and Claudio. That Borachio’s intention in gaining entry into the house was surveillance is signalled by Don John’s immediately asking him, upon his entry, “What news, Borachio?” (1.2.33). Indeed, Scenes Two and Three of Act One serve, together, to create a sense of Leonato’s home as potentially rife with spies. That Don Pedro and Claudio are overheard twice discussing the anticipated wooing of and betrothal to Hero in two separate locations and by two separate interested parties casts Leonato’s home as a hive of surveillance. After the opening half of the first scene, the first act revolves entirely around intelligence-gathering and the relation of and reaction to said intelligence. The very architecture of the building and the grounds seems virtually designed to facilitate surreptitious observation. Antonio’s unnamed servant is able to conceal himself within a “thick-pleached alley” (1.2.8) in Leonato’s orchard, and then Borachio is able to hide behind an arras in order to observe the Prince and Claudio.

Though the intelligence gathered – variations of the same information, that is, Claudio’s affection for and planned wooing of Hero – is ostensibly apolitical, it is recast in each scene in such a way as to underscore the way in which romance is inextricably
tied to more worldly concerns. In the first instance, once his “secret” is revealed to Don Pedro, Claudio asks, “Hath Leonato any son, my lord?” (1.1.242), betraying immediately motivations beyond simple romance. In the second scene, the refiguring by Antonio’s servant of the anticipated betrothal into a potential marriage between Don Pedro and Hero links romantic intrigue in the play with fundamentally political concerns, if only briefly. Finally, Don John’s plan to use the romance for his own treasonous\textsuperscript{14} purposes invests the relationship of the would-be lovers with undeniably political implications.

Thus, though the first act offers the audience the promise of an escape from political intrigue, marked by Claudio’s declaration of his shifting priorities (“now I am returned, and that war-thoughts / Have left their places vacant, in their rooms / Come thronging soft and delicate desires” (1.2.249-51)), what it actually presents, if only subtly, is a world in which “soft and delicate desires” are observed and manipulated through duplicity and espionage and are, furthermore, not only the object of private concern, but of state interest and interference as well.

As a number of critics have noted, the play presents, in addition to the false binary of love and politics, another, more explicitly antagonistic opposition: that between Don Pedro and his brother, the bastard Don John. Specifically, critics have observed that both Don Pedro and Don John stage events and their surveillance throughout the play. As Jean Howard observes, “Don Pedro and Don John both devise pageants designed to deceive specific audiences” (163). However, given Margaret’s apparent ignorance of Don John and Borachio’s plan (5.2.284-87), the episode seems less a self-conscious

\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of the way in which Don John’s deceit constitutes an attack not only on his brother, but on the entire structure of authority in Messina, see Chapter Five, pages 133-38.
“pageant” than a manipulated observation, in a manner similar to the equivalent episodes in *Othello*. Howard later refines her discussion of the two men, stating,

Moreover, while Don John is the play’s villain, he is also the bastard brother of the play’s highest-ranking figure. This fact is ideologically significant because it locates the “natural” origins of social disruption in those who do not legitimately occupy a place in the traditional social order. (175)

Though the bastard is indeed figured as an outsider to the proper social order, he is also intrinsically linked, through the father, to that order. As such, Don John’s orchestration of the surveillance of “Hero,” though unauthorized, can still be connected genealogically to the Prince’s own use of surveillance as a mode of social control.

In this way, the play addresses an interesting conflict inherent to the state’s use of such methods of social control. That is, the very structures of disciplinary authority through which the state works to observe and correct its subjects provide its opponents with the means by which to undermine it. Beale’s warning that the Secretary of State should beware the possibility that his agents “abuse [him] w[i]th toyes and matters of their owne invenc[i]on” (437) thus rings true regarding not just individuals but the very system. By policing and corralling knowledge, the structure of secrecy that Karl Marx describes as the hallmark of bureaucracy (47) leaves the state vulnerable to infiltration and subversion in the very same ways that the state itself seeks, through these same methods, to infiltrate and subvert those it has determined to be a threat.

If Leonato’s home is ostensibly an apolitical sphere, one in which state authority functions only implicitly, then outside of the walls Messina proper is the world of explicit
policing, of Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch. The introduction of Dogberry and the
Watch occurs notably late in the play. As Herbert Weil writes,

Dogberry and Verges not only do not appear in the first half of the play,
they are not even mentioned—either by name or in the most general
functional terms. In contrast, clowns and other main comic characters in
each of Shakespeare’s other eleven comedies through Measure for
Measure (1604) appear much earlier. (309)

Another instance of the play’s ostensibly bipartite nature, the absence not only of
Dogberry from the company of the other characters, but also, as Weil observes, of any
mention of him until his arrival in the latter half of the third act, is indicative of the way
in which his appearance signals a fundamental shift in the play as a whole. Put simply,
the play has ceased, at least temporarily, its pretence to being a love story. The arrival of
Dogberry makes explicit what has been, in the preceding portion of the play, tacit: the
ferreting out of secrets and the enforcement of state authority are abiding concerns in
Much Ado About Nothing. Thus it is no coincidence that Dogberry’s entrance takes place
just as, offstage, Claudio and Don Pedro watch Margaret’s inadvertent performance of
Hero’s infidelity stage-managed by Don John.

Thus Dogberry draws attention away from acts of surveillance performed by the
state through his own carnivalesque orchestration of these same acts. It is the same sort
of overlapping of parody and reality that Jean Baudrillard attributes to Disneyland in
Simulacra and Simulation:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the “real” country, all of “real”
America that is Disneyland. [...] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in
order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. (12-13)

That is, in an act of cultural scapegoating, one carefully segregated aspect of a culture is made the bearer of a range of anxieties that might more properly be directed towards the culture as a whole. Much Ado About Nothing is a play that engages on a number of occasions, as Harry Berger has noted, in processes of scapegoating: “The play’s two scapegoats are a bastard named Trouble and a woman named Hero” (311). I would argue that Dogberry’s late, though timely, arrival in the play performs a similar function. His larger-than-life performance of the police work of the state draws attention away from similar acts of policing going on behind the walls of Leonato’s home. Dogberry is a target for anxieties about the ubiquity of surveillance that could extend to a large part of the action of Much Ado About Nothing.

This helps, furthermore, to explain the odd isolation of Dogberry and Verges, who appear on stage with almost none of the other main characters of the play. Of the major characters in the play, only Leonato, Don Pedro, and Claudio, the former two having already been established by this point in the play as spymasters in their own rights, appear with Dogberry, and, in the case of Don Pedro and Claudio, only in the fifth act, in Dogberry’s final scene.

Don Pedro’s connection to Dogberry and the Watch is somewhat unclear, partly due to Dogberry’s only intermittently intelligible mode of speech. That there is a

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15 Berger’s odd identification of Don John as “Trouble” is derived from Leonato’s statement, to Don Pedro, “Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace” (1.1.80-1).
relationship at all is only hinted at obliquely in the course of Dogberry’s instructions to the Watch. In his final instructions to the Watch, Dogberry states, “You, constable, are to present the Prince’s own person. If you meet the Prince in the night, you may stay him” (3.3.66-68). The Watch is, according to Dogberry, a representative of, and thereby equivalent in power to, the Prince. This gross caricature of the delegation of power is interesting in that it presents one of the few explicit connections of the work of the Watch to other authority figures in the play. Furthermore, it poses the question of what Prince Dogberry is referring to. As Dogberry explains to Leonato in a subsequent scene, he and Verges are “the poor Duke’s officers” (3.5.17-18). The Watch, however, “present the Prince’s own person” and arrest Borachio and Conrad “in the Prince’s name” (3.3.143-44).

Given that the play has, as one of its characters, a Prince, that is, Don Pedro, it seems reasonable to read the Watch as representatives, not of local Messinan authority, but of transplanted Aragonian authority.17 Positing a second, otherwise unmentioned Prince, to whom Dogberry and Verges do not seem to owe personal allegiance, being officers of the Duke, is one possible, if somewhat cumbersome, explanation of the Watch’s instructions. Another is that the Watch are an *ad hoc* assemblage, formed in order to provide security for and around the visiting Prince, Don Pedro. This possibility offers an explanation, beyond providing a showcase for Dogberry and Verges’s tendency

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16 The relationship is also perhaps hinted at punningly, with “Dogberry” serving as a bastardization of “Don Piero,” the name of the character in Matteo Bandello’s *La Prima Parte de le Novelle* (1554) upon whom the character of Don Pedro is based in part; in this way, Dogberry, too, can be understood as sharing a lineage, of sorts, with Don Pedro.

17 Though Sicily was officially under Spanish control throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was administered by the nominal Kings of Aragon, who had ruled the island from 1282 until the unification of Aragon and Castile in 1469.
for malapropism, for the fact that the members of the Watch are recruited by Dogberry for immediate service. In a note, the editors of *The Norton Shakespeare* gloss Verges’s name as follows: “‘Verges’ probably alludes to a ‘verge,’ or wand of office, carried by officials” (1416 n.1). In early modern England, “verge” is also a term used to describe a mobile zone of authority encompassing everything within a twelve mile radius of the monarch’s person. Understood thus, the Watch and its disciplinary function are linked to Don Pedro in more than simply thematic terms. They exist as an extension of him, and their disciplinary power is derived from and reflective of his own.

IV

“O that I had been writ down an ass!”

The act of writing is highlighted throughout the scenes that feature Dogberry and the Watch. First, when assigning duties to the Watch, Dogberry is informed by one of the watchmen that the position of constable should be assigned to either Hugh Oatcake or George Seacoal, “for they can write and read” (3.3.10-11). In this way, the process of law enforcement is immediately associated with a privileging of literacy, in order to ensure that the constable “knows the statutes” (3.3.70-71), obviously an advantage to one who would enforce them. Despite this initial concern, reading and writing have little immediate bearing on the work of policing in the play, given that the Watch is charged with patrolling the street rather than investigating documents. The place of writing in investigation only becomes clear later, with Dogberry’s interrogation of Borachio and Conrad in the next act. Dogberry evinces an overwhelming desire to control the way in which the interrogation is documented by the Sexton. By the time that the Sexton leaves, 59 lines into the scene, Dogberry has instructed him on five separate occasions to record in writing the substance of Borachio’s and Conrad’s answers. Indeed, even after the
Sexton has left, Dogberry continues to demonstrate his obsession with the evidentiary power of the written word. Following Conrad’s characterization of him as “an ass” (4.2.66), Dogberry laments the departure of the Sexton: “O that he were here to write me down an ass! But masters, remember that I am an ass. Though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass” (4.2.68-70). Though he asks his fellow officers to stand in for the departed Sexton’s pen and paper, it is clear that they are not an ideal replacement, and Dogberry’s lament resurfaces in the final line of the scene: “O that I had been writ down an ass!” (4.2.77-78). In this way, the play presents, via Dogberry, a hierarchy of evidence, in which the written word is granted primacy over oral testimony.

Thomas Moisan argues that Dogberry’s desire to be “writ down” devalues writing in the play: “How estimable can texts be, after all, the play seems to ask, if Dogberry insists on being inscribed in one?” (168). This interpretation of Dogberry’s lament requires a specific understanding of Dogberry’s role in the play, namely that his desires represent an inversion of the desires represented in the rest of the play. This is not my understanding of Dogberry’s function in *Much Ado About Nothing*. I would argue that the different valuation of written documentation and oral testimony, though played here for comic effect, surfaces elsewhere in the play as well. For instance, when they ask what penance they must perform to atone for their slander of Hero, Claudio and Don Pedro are instructed by Leonato to

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Possess the people in Messina here
How innocent she died, and if your love
Can labour aught in sad invention,
Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb
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And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight. (5.1.265-69)

Thus, while it was a verbal slander that “killed” Hero, it is an act of writing that is demanded to prove her innocence. In a way, the epitaph is the final step in a legal process which began with the apprehension of Borachio and Conrad; it is essentially a proclamation, officially re-establishing Hero’s virginity.¹⁸ Indeed, the interest of the state, embodied in the person of Don Pedro, in ascertaining Hero’s sexual status prefigures the infamous 1613 annulment of the marriage of Frances Howard to Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. Howard and Devereux were married in 1606, when the bride and groom were in their early teens. Howard applied for an annulment of the marriage in 1613 on the grounds that her husband was impotent and therefore unable to consummate their marriage. In order to obtain the annulment, Howard was required to submit to an examination by six women so that they might determine:

1. Whether the Lady Frances were a woman fit and apt for carnal copulation, without any defect which might disable her for that purpose.

2. Whether she were a virgin carnally unknown by any man. (qtd in Le Comte 101)

Just as Frances Howard was ultimately determined by the panel of women to be a virgin, so Hero is similarly exonerated by the investigation into Don John’s scheme. Unlike that of Hero, however, Howard’s status as a virgin seems to have been questionable and there was some debate as to whether or not the panel’s finding was accurate. Howard and her

¹⁸ It is also significantly reminiscent of the French amende honorable, in which, as Foucault describes it, “the condemned man solemnly acknowledged his crime: ‘Barefoot, wearing a shirt, carrying a torch, kneeling, to say and to declare that wickedly, horribly, treacherously, he has committed the most detestable crime, etc.’” (Foucault 1995, 43). This provocative combination of power and subjugation fulfills Dogberry’s prescient characterization of the Prince as subject to his own authority.
second husband, Robert Carr, who had recently been made Earl of Somerset, and had of late been a favourite of King James, were tried for the murder of Thomas Overbury, who was threatening to reveal that Howard and Carr had been sexually involved before Howard’s marriage to Devereux had been annulled. The declaration of the court, then, should be understood not as a finding of virginity, but rather an inscription thereof.

The epitaph to Hero functions similarly, publicly and permanently establishing her status as Diana’s “virgin Knight” (5.3.13). Almost literally, Hero is, as Jean Howard observes, “the blank sheet upon which men write whore or goddess” (181) or, less exotically, but apparently more importantly, “virgin.” Clearly, this is not the sort of ironized reverence for the written word that Moisan identifies in Dogberry, but rather an assertion of its conceptual power in the play to reconstruct reality. Similarly, when Benedick denies any affection for Beatrice, and Beatrice does the same for Benedick, their claims are disproved by the revelation of their having written sonnets to each other. Benedick’s reaction to the discovery of the poems is informed by the same dynamic between written and verbal evidence as Dogberry’s desire to be “writ down an ass” or the reclamation of Hero’s innocence: “A miracle! Here’s our own hands against our hearts” (5.4.91). The scene, like Dogberry’s complaint, privileges the evidentiary power of the written word over that of verbal testimony, as Benedick and Beatrice are forced, by their writings, to bear witness against themselves.

The written word is presented throughout the play as possessing, for the characters, a stability of signification that cannot be found either in verbal communication or through personal observation. It offers unequivocal evidence in a world characterized by mistakings and dissimulations. Though the play does, as Moisan
notes, open with a subordination of text, through Beatrice’s interruption of the messenger in the first scene, that subordination is not permanent: it is with the return of the written word in the final acts of the play that order is restored. First, Don John’s plot is revealed through the deposition of Borachio and Conrad; then, through the placing of Hero’s epitaph by Claudio and Don Pedro, Hero’s honour is restored and she and Claudio (or at least Leonato and Claudio) are reconciled; and finally, through the discovery of Beatrice’s and Benedick’s sonnets, they too are assimilated into the traditional comic trajectory of the play. In this way, the play presents a world in which the foremost authority is not the self, but an exteriorized, documentary authority, whose de-personalized and permanent nature allows it to transcend the instability of subjective observation and verbal testimony. It should be noted, however, that implicit in this exploration of the reparative power of the written word and, through it, the power of the state, is a warning of the inverse possibility as well. That is, as the unstable legal status of Frances Howard’s virginity demonstrates, the state’s ability to create truth is simultaneously a power to obscure it, whether deliberately or through error.

This representation in *Much Ado About Nothing* of the performative power of the written word, of the ability for it to create that which it describes, raises an important question: If writing is so powerful in the play, then how is it that Dogberry, who is very possibly illiterate, is able to undo Don John’s plot when the far more educated, and explicitly literate, inhabitants of Leonato’s home are not? I would like to suggest that it is precisely Dogberry’s exclusion from the realm of the literate, or at least from the company of readers, which makes it possible for him to play a pivotal role in clearing Hero’s name. Dogberry’s alienation from writing forces him to rely on the work of the
Sexton in order that the two may, co-operatively, depose Conrad and Borachio and relate the content of that deposition to Leonato, Don Pedro, and Claudio. While Justice Overdo renounces his bureaucratic underlings as inferior, and, in doing so, collapses the bureaucratic chain of authority into himself, Dogberry recognizes, and acknowledges, that he is dependent on the work of those under his command and, furthermore, that he operates under an authority greater than himself.

From his initial instructions to the watch to his final exit, Dogberry makes no gesture towards social climbing, and does his best, unsuited to the task though he may be, to observe proper linguistic protocol when addressing Leonato. As Moisan puts it, Dogberry possesses “an instinct, if not aptitude, for deference” (179). The point is not, however, that Dogberry represents some sort of ideal of impermeable class boundaries. The key to Dogberry’s success is that he remains removed from the machinations of the rest of the characters. Just as he is alienated from the Sexton’s transcription of the interrogation, so too is he alienated from the intrigue surrounding the case that he investigates.

The heterogeneity of the disciplinary world of *Much Ado About Nothing* offers, along the lines of the process described by Miller, a corrective to the panoptic fantasy of the Duke’s ubiquitous observation of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*. While a solitary viewpoint, even if its possessor were omnipresent, can only ever offer one point of view, disciplinary surveillance in *Much Ado About Nothing* works itself out through the merging of multiple viewpoints, each correcting and supplementing the other in order to construct, in the place of a panoptic gaze, a synoptic gaze, the very sort of seeing with other men’s eyes and hearing with other men’s ears that Justice Overdo erroneously
rejects in favour of his own very limited perspective. Interestingly, the play puts the audience itself into the role of intelligencer. In the first scene of *Much Ado*, the audience, in observing the planning, by Don Pedro and Claudio, of the wooing of Hero, balances the two subsequent scenes by playing the part that is played in the second scene by Antonio’s servant and in the third by Borachio: the role of unseen observer.

Furthermore, while Don Pedro and Claudio witness for themselves the infidelity of “Hero,” the audience is only aware of it as the result of “overhearing” first the planning, by Borachio and Don John, of the gulling of Claudio and Don Pedro and then the events being recounted by Borachio to Conrad. Significantly, in the scene in which Borachio explains the plot to Conrad, the audience is forced to understand the events of the evening not through direct observation, but rather through the collection and analysis of gathered intelligence. Through this effect, the audience is placed in an identical position to the Watch, who of course misconstrue what they have heard. The dramatic irony which arises from the Watch’s misunderstanding of Conrad and Borachio makes plain for the audience the subjective nature of individual observation, and the play thus conscripts it into its representation of the need for, and superiority of, a surveillance based on a multiplicity of viewpoints rather than on only one.

In incorporating the audience into its representation of discipline, the play also complicates critical theorizations of the nature of the representation of disciplinary authority on the Renaissance stage. As Lorna Hutson notes, “Common to both ‘disciplinary’ and ‘spectacular’ emphases in the Foucauldian interpretation of Renaissance tragedy […] has been the underlying assumption that English judicial
investigations are always identified with, and administered by, the state” (31). Hutson questions the validity of this assumption drawing attention to “the possibility that the detection of criminality and the right to judge it may have figured in popular English consciousness as, at least in part, the responsibility of the people” (31). While I agree with Hutson that early modern drama does at times figure judicial investigation as the province of society at large, and believe that Much Ado About Nothing offers a vision of communal investigation and justice that complements the revenge tragedies cited by Hutson, I differ from Hutson in understanding this diffusion of investigative authority as existing outside of Foucault’s paradigm of “The Spectacle of the Scaffold.” That is, I would argue that these scenes of ostensibly independent investigation are characteristic of the ascendance of the bureaucratic structures that Foucault posits as subsuming and superseding spectacular, pre-classical modes of social domination.

It is my contention that these different interpretations of the nature of communal justice in Renaissance drama are, at least in part, the result of the different effects of the genres of romantic comedy and revenge tragedy. However, it is important to note that of the three revenge tragedies mentioned in any detail by Hutson, two – The Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet – are intensely concerned with the structure and operation of bureaucratic authority. Furthermore, in one of those, The Spanish Tragedy, the figure

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20 It should also be noted that Hutson’s article, though it advertises itself as an analysis of “Juridical Epistemologies and English Revenge Tragedy,” is in effect a reading of those epistemologies as they inform and construct the plot of one revenge
into whose investigative practices the audience has been conscripted is Hieronimo, the bureaucrat. It is thus difficult to ascertain clearly what aspects of this investigation are fully distinct from Hieronimo’s status as a functionary of the state. Similarly, the investigation in which the audience partakes in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is Dogberry’s, the success of which results in the reassertion of comedy as the dominant generic paradigm of the play. In a reversal of expectations, the threat of death (to Claudio, to Hero) within the green space of Leonato’s estate is chased out by the intervention of the disciplinary city.

The return to generic supremacy of comedy raises a question, however: what is the meaning implicit in the play’s linking together of the stuff of romantic comedy – that is, marriage, chastity, sublimated eroticism, among others – and the disciplinary function of the bureaucratic state? In a discussion of the politics of Shakespearean romantic comedy Leonard Tennenhouse argues that “to write about courtship and marriage in Elizabethan England was to take up a political argument,” as “Position, place, and power were almost exclusively a matter of kinship and courtship” (19). As discussed above, this is certainly the case in *Much Ado About Nothing*, as the repeated and increasingly politicized discussions of Claudio’s impending betrothal to Hero indicate. I would argue further that the way in which comedy trades in a desire for the establishment of order – socially, thematically – and, more specifically, for the establishment of that order as a totality, offers a more congenial medium for *Much Ado*’s representation of the need for a tragedy, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. While the discussion of *Titus* is the focus of the last ten pages of the article, *Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy* are mentioned only sporadically in the first four pages of the article and then are not discussed again until *Hamlet* is re-invoked in the final sentence.

\[21\] A discussion which, notably, does not so much as mention *Much Ado About Nothing*. 
disciplinary authority that is characterized by multiplicity and interconnectedness than would the generic conventions of tragedy.\textsuperscript{22}

Furthermore, \textit{Much Ado}'s comic plot – a plot that repeatedly threatens to give way to the tragic\textsuperscript{23} – stages a transition away from the deployment of spectacular violence by the state as a means of social control. That is, though the play repeatedly makes reference to traditional spectacular displays of violence and power, those displays are always, in some way, undermined. Hero’s death, the result of her being punished for her “crime,” is, of course, faked. Beatrice’s order that Benedick “Kill Claudio” (4.1.287), in retribution for his treatment of Hero, though accepted, is never carried out. When, at the end of the play, Don John is captured, he is captured offstage and, though Benedick promises “brave punishments” (5.4.122), those punishments are deferred in order for the wedding celebrations to continue. In this way the play stages a transition to what D. A. Miller describes in his discussion of Victorian detective fiction as “the modern policing power that comes to rely less on spectacular displays of force than on intangible networks of productive discipline” (Miller 51).

Of course, writ down or not, Dogberry is an ass, albeit a well-meaning one, and an argument that posits him as the ideal figure of the play must necessarily be built on unstable ground. In a play marked by linguistic virtuosity, Dogberry is outmatched by virtually everyone he encounters. What he represents, however, is a way of negotiating authority, both his own and that of those above him, which reflects back on the

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example, the final scenes of \textit{Twelfth Night} and \textit{As You Like It}. I would argue that the absence of Dogberry in the final scene of \textit{Much Ado} is an indication of the extent to which his function has been assimilated by that point by the other characters in the play.

\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, the plot does give way to the tragic when it is retold as \textit{Othello} (1604-05).
aristocratic characters of the play. Discussing Dogberry’s role in the play, Theodore Leinwand argues that “The constabulary effect destabilizes hierarchy and truth not so much through inversion or parody [...] as through inmixing” (484). That is, Dogberry links together apparently disparate elements of the play – green world and city, aristocracy and tradesmen – and in doing so undermines attempts to understand in the play in terms of simple binary oppositions. Michael Braddick also notes the doubled nature of the constable’s role: “In exercising their office constables responded both to administrative command and to local expectations of appropriate behaviour” (34). Phoebe Spinrad identifies this combination as potentially problematic, arguing that the Elizabethan constable represents a nexus of competing loyalties: “As a local resident, he was usually torn between loyalty to his own community and responsibility to his superiors and the central government” (166). Joan Kent, too, notes that the constable’s multiple allegiances “made his position the focus of conflict” (56). However, she also claims that “The fact that the constable occupied a position where two distinct hierarchies of authority intersected, probably enhanced his ability to mediate between them” (55-6).

I would argue that Kent’s characterization of the constable’s role is closest to the representation of it that we see in Dogberry; indeed, Dogberry demonstrates a remarkable ability to move between groups and to shift subject positions, from instructor of the Watch, to co-interrogator, to deferential civil servant. I would argue furthermore that this flexibility offers an example of properly balanced bureaucratic labour, a balance of loyalties that Benedick has difficulty achieving throughout most of the play.

In a play that is so concerned with the policing of women’s desires, it is not surprising that each of the three instances of reclamatory writing discussed above
involves the reinscription of a woman into a socially sanctioned gender role.

Significantly, though, in the third example, the discovery of the sonnets, Benedick, too, is returned to his “proper” place within the power structure of the play. While Howard is correct in asserting that Benedick betrays his loyalty to Don Pedro and Claudio in accepting Beatrice’s command to “Kill Claudio” (4.1.287), I would like to complicate the claim that this is simply a “disruption of the patriarchal order” (180).

Benedick’s loyalty to Don Pedro is not only based on gender alignment, but also on his obligation to the Prince as his employer. As argued above, Benedick demonstrates, in the first scene of the play, his position in the court of Don Pedro. Identifying himself as loyal foremost to the state, to the potential detriment of his homosocial bond to Claudio, Benedick draws attention to the way in which the fellowship of men must be subordinated, in the play, to the demands of duty. In this manner, his acceptance of Beatrice’s charge to kill Claudio is not just a betrayal of the bonds of gender, but also a potentially treasonous submission to an authority other than his Prince. Furthermore, the role that Beatrice demands of him is markedly similar to the position he holds under Don Pedro. That is, her demand that he kill Claudio as punishment for his slander of Hero prefigures his offer to Don Pedro to “devise […] brave punishments” for Don John for the very same slander.

Thus Benedick finds himself negotiating, in the final scene of the play, between three competing demands on his loyalty: the demands of duty, fellowship, and love. Although Don John’s plot has already been discovered and thwarted, Benedick maintains his, by that point, fictitious animosity towards Don Pedro and Claudio, which is noted by Don Pedro, who asks, “What’s the matter/ That you have such a February face,/ So full of
frost, of storm and cloudiness?” (5.4.40-42). In doing so, Benedick chooses once again, as far as the other two men are concerned, to be loyal to Beatrice, to the detriment of his relationships with his prince and his friend. Following the revelation of “Another Hero” (5.4.62), and Beatrice’s and Benedick’s reluctant declarations of love for one another, Benedick establishes, in the space of the final twenty-seven lines of the play, a hierarchy of his loyalties, as they are divided among Beatrice, Claudio, and the Prince. First, Benedick demonstrates publicly his love for Beatrice by “stop[ping] her mouth” with a kiss (5.4.96). Next, turning to Claudio, he states, “For thy part, Claudio, I did think to have beaten thee, but in that thou art like to be my kinsman, live unbruised, and love my cousin” (5.4.105-107). It seems, then, that Benedick’s loyalty to Claudio is predicated on, and therefore subordinate to, his marriage to Beatrice, although an argument could certainly be made that the homosocial bond between the two is strengthened by the marriages. The interweaving of these two loyalties is signalled by Benedick’s invitation to “have a dance ere we are married” (5.4.112-13), in which it is unclear whether the pronoun “we” refers to Benedick and Beatrice or to Benedick and Claudio.

What is significant about the hierarchy of loyalties delineated in the final lines of the play is not, however, whether Benedick’s bond to Beatrice is stronger than his bond to Claudio, or vice versa. It is in the final moments of the play, when the celebrations are interrupted with the news of Don John’s capture, that Benedick demonstrates the extent to which he has re-established his loyalty to Don Pedro, which, though it was paramount in the opening scene, has been threatened over the course of the play. In response to the news that Don John has been captured, Benedick ceases, momentarily, the celebration of his anticipated nuptials in order to serve his Prince, if only by promising to serve him
more fully the following day by devising “punishments” for the traitorous Don John. Thus Benedick’s loyalty to his ruler, though granted hierarchical supremacy through its placement at the end of the scene, and the play, is not his sole loyalty, but rather one of a number of interdependent “faiths and troths” (1.1.184), as he puts it. In this way, Benedick provides a figure of the type that Robert Cecil seems to describe when he expresses a desire for a civil servant who will “deale lesse,” as opposed to not at all, “with other mens suites” (3, my italics). Rather than imagining an agent whose interests are entirely indistinguishable from those of the state, both Cecil’s treatise and Much Ado About Nothing offer a pragmatic solution to the question of loyalty, favouring an economy of loyalties in which the agent of the state belongs simultaneously, though not equally, to the state and to society.
Chapter Five: *Hamlet* and the Resistant Subject of Bureaucracy

I know that Deformed. A has been a vile thief this seven year.

Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*¹

HAMLET Is not parchment made of sheepskins?
HORATIO Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too.
HAMLET They are sheep and calves that seek out assurance in
that

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*²

In a poem entitled *The King’s Disguise*, published in 1646, John Cleveland describes the flight of a disguised Charles I from his Parliamentary antagonists. The poem opens with a discussion of the debased nature of Charles’s state:

And why a tenant to this vile disguise,
Which who but sees blasphemes thee with his eyes?
My twins of Light within their Pent-house shrink,
And hold it their allegiance to wink. (1-4)

For Cleveland, the gap between Charles’s appearance and his status as King is troubling. His solution, at the beginning of the poem, is not to look in order to deny the depths to which his monarch has been forced to sink. In doing so, Cleveland enacts a sort of negation of the King’s disguise, re-envisioning him as clothed in his royal attire. In the latter half of the poem, Cleveland continues to describe the physical appearance of the disguised king but the imagery shifts and images of writing and documents begin to dominate. Charles’s face is, for example, described as follows: “Thy visage is not legible, the Letters / Like a Lord’s name writ in fantastick fetters” (61-62). The textual

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¹ *Much Ado About Nothing* 3.3.110-11.
² *Hamlet* 5.1.104-07.
analogies continue, as the King’s clothes are characterized as “A Libell” and his enemies both “Scribling Assassinate” and pursue “this slandering suite” (69, 71, 81). Marshalling this new set of images together, Cleveland characterizes himself in the terms of the master-secretary relationship: “But pardon Sir, since I presume to be / Clarke of this Closet to Your Majesty” (89-90). This declaration marks a shift in the tone of the poem from lamentation to defiance, and, soon after, Charles is transformed from a debased king to a “Text Royall” (95). In this manner, his disguise, formerly the source of shame, is recast as a sort of code, as a hiding of the true “text” of his royal person behind an encryption, not “legible” to the untrained eye, but apparent to those who know where, and how, to look.

These images prefigure a more explicit discussion of texts and encryption in the poem. As the verse paragraph that follows hints obliquely, the idea of encoded messages (and their interpretation) is central to his attack on the King’s enemies. Denouncing those enemies, Cleveland writes,

    Hence Cabinet-untrussers, Pick-locks hence,
    You that dimne jewels with your *Bristol*-sense:
    And Characters, like Witches, so torment,
    Till they confesse a guilt, though innocent. (103-06)

The personification of “Characters” here may slip past a modern reader, given that the current dominant sense of the word denotes the representation of a person, whereas in Cleveland’s poem, the word refers not to people, but to writing. As Lois Potter points out, Cleveland comments in this passage on the work of Parliamentary cryptologists, who analyzed the King’s private correspondence, decrypted what they could, and published
the results as *The King's Cabinet Discovered* in 1645 (39). These “Cabinet-untrussers” laid bare all of the King’s letters, both personal and political, in an effort to discredit him with the general populace.

Cleveland, however, asserts for Charles the power to resist the unlicensed exploration of his private thoughts: “Keyes for this coffer you can never get, / None but S. Peter’s op’s this Cabinet” (107-08). Thus, Cleveland claims some sort of inscrutable interiority for Charles. The terms in which he phrases this claim are reminiscent of a number of works examined in previous chapters. Like Angel Day, Cleveland presents himself as the steward of his master’s secrets. Furthermore, as in Nicholas Faunt’s discourse, the image of the secretary’s closet is further refined and recast as the bureaucratic “Cabinet.” At the same time, in Cleveland’s poem almost everything is understood in terms of both politics and religion. For instance, while the characterization of the King’s disguise as an encryption is made in terms of statecraft, it is simultaneously achieved through religious analogy: “Methinks in this your dark mysterious dresse / I see the Gospel coucht in Parables” (91-92). By way of this religious register, the Cabinet is linked with the self in such a way that Charles’s interiority is rendered permanently inaccessible to his antagonists. There are ironies, however, in Cleveland’s assertions. First, his statement that torture – albeit figurative torture – forces “Characters” to “confesse a guilt, though innocent” (105-06) reminds the reader of what had been a notorious form of state violence. Also, if Charles’s innermost thoughts and identity are indeed inscrutable, does this not hold true for all objects of state investigation? Would this, then, indicate that the monarch’s desire, and ability, to see his subjects by way of spy networks and other apparatuses of state power is not absolute? It seems that, in order to
claim for Charles some degree of independence, Cleveland must discredit the very systems of surveillance through which Charles, as monarch, held power over his subjects.

Imitating Charles’s own transformation from ultimate wielder of state power to the subject of those very systems of authority over which he formerly ruled, this chapter shifts its focus from those in control and in the employ of the state to the objects of their authority. That is, the chapter examines the subject of and in bureaucracy, paying special attention to the way in which resistant subjects deploy strategies of dissimulation as a means of evading and misleading the surveillance and discipline of the state. Though its main topic of inquiry is Hamlet, the chapter also discusses other representations of resistant subjects in order to contextualize Hamlet’s performance of inscrutability. Distinguishing between two methods of frustrating the disciplinary gaze, the chapter examines first a model of private, inscrutable interiority the key to whose evasion of the examination of state discipline is the perfect performance of submission. Representative of this model is Don John, the villain of Much Ado About Nothing. Don John is significant in a number of ways to understanding Shakespeare’s representation of Hamlet’s claim to interiority. First, he offers an alternative to Hamlet’s ostentatious performance of secrecy. Furthermore, his portrayal undermines attempts to draw simple equations between villainy and any specific position within the power relations described within this chapter. That is, Claudius and Don John are clearly the villains of their respective plays; however, one represents state authority and the other its inscrutable subject. Thus, when read together, the two plays offer a portrait of a system of power relations divorced from easy characterizations as right and wrong or good and evil. Next, the chapter turns to the second method of hindering investigation: encoding. Examining
first early modern theorizations of encryption and then Thomas Harman’s account of the canti
ging language of the Elizabethan underworld, the chapter draws attention to the way in which Hamlet’s performance of inscrutability, with its incessant wordplay and obscure language, aligns him with the showy resistance to authority exemplified by thieves’ cant. Thus, while Don John works to conceal the very existence of any reason for surveillance, Hamlet adopts an “antic disposition” (2.1.173) which serves to mark him, in the context of the bureaucratic desire to know – which is to say document – its subjects, as being in opposition to the desires of the state, thereby inviting the very gaze he seeks to thwart.

I

“Liegemen to the Dane”: Allegiance in Claudius’s Court

Like Cleveland’s poem, *Hamlet* opens with a declaration of allegiance. In response to Marcellus’s demand that he “unfold” himself, Barnardo, instead of identifying himself by name, simply states, “Long live the King!” (1.1.3). Setting aside the irony of Barnardo’s choice of greeting, given that the watch are about to see the ghost of the dead king, which will in turn set in motion events which will result in the death of the current king, I would like to note the way in which Barnardo characterizes himself through his statement as wholly dedicated to serving the king. As a member of the watch, his identity is defined entirely, as Timothy Reiss puts it, “in terms of his military and social function” (Reiss 1980, 162). Indeed, each of the characters in turn identify themselves not by name, but, as Marcellus puts it, as “liegemen to the Dane” (12). Though on the surface this allegiance seems unproblematic, the opening scene of the play is structured in such a way as to make it unclear who is indicated by these declarations of fealty. While the ghost is identified first as being “In the figure of the King that’s dead” (39), he is later identified by name as “our valiant Hamlet” (83). Later, the watchmen
decide to “impart what [they] have seen […] / Unto young Hamlet” (150). Significantly, Claudius is never named in this scene; he is only referred to as “the King” (3) and “the Dane” (12). Thus, if only for a brief moment, the play allows for the possibility that Hamlet, who is clearly identified as the son of the dead king, has ascended to the throne of Denmark following the death of his father. This possibility is quickly and definitively foreclosed with the opening of the following scene, as Claudius – presumably quite unmistakably costumed as the King – clarifies his relationship to the former king, referring to “Hamlet our dear brother’s death” (1.2.1). In this way the play highlights the expulsion of Hamlet from the inner circle of royal power that would have occurred upon his father’s death. Furthermore, this brief glimpse of another possible existence for Hamlet serves to underscore the awkward position of Hamlet in Claudius’s court.

According to Ophelia, Hamlet is “Th’observed of all observers” (3.1.153). Though the comment is coloured by the context of Hamlet’s persecution by Claudius and his representatives, Ophelia means this as complimentary, not as a threat or a warning. Hamlet is “the one to watch” in the court at Elsinore. This statement underscores the duality of observation as it is a function of the court in the play; one the one hand, public visibility, the observation of Hamlet at court, is a sign of his status, of the esteem in which he is held. On the other hand, Ophelia’s statement refers simultaneously, and ominously, to the more explicitly disciplinary surveillance of Hamlet in which Polonius and Claudius are, at that moment, engaged. The two positions – powerful courtier and subject of royal surveillance – are not, of course, mutually exclusive by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, the early modern court is rife with examples of the danger to courtiers of rising too high in power or esteem. The threat posed by the royal favourite to
other courtiers (and the threat posed to royal favourites by other courtiers) was discussed in Chapter Two. Here the issue is the perception of threat that exists reciprocally between the courtier and the monarch. The threat is reciprocal because the act of surveillance works simultaneously as an expression of royal power and as an indication of the tenuousness of that power. That is, if someone needs to be watched, then she or he must possess the potential to damage the monarch, in one way or another.

It is thus interesting, given the implicit threat involved in granting power to those around him, that Claudius exerts power in large part through the use of agents. Indeed, the first action that Claudius undertakes in the play, after a brief monologue establishing his position as monarch, is the instructing of his ambassadors to Norway:

and here we dispatch

You, good Cornelius, and you, Valtemand,

For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,

Giving to you no further personal power

To business with the King more than the scope

Of these dilated articles allow. (1.2.33-38)

When he sends his ambassadors to Norway, Claudius delineates, quite precisely, the limits of the authority to which they are entitled as his emissaries. This act of carefully circumscribed delegation is an indication of Claudius’s awareness of the vulnerability engendered by his designation of others as the bearers of his authority. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the ghost’s accusations in the previous scene with this careful circumscription of Cornelius and Valtemand’a authority offers an indication of the degree to which the play is concerned with the uses and abuses of authority by and against the
Claudius, himself a transgressor, fears transgression by those around him, and works to limit the ways in which his trust may be abused. At the same time, the embassy to Norway offers a concrete example of the impossibility of Claudius’s running the state without using agents.  

Of course, Claudius consistently conducts affairs of state through agents. Indeed, there are virtually no significant actions in the play that Claudius undertakes alone. Claudius’s mode of government is repeatedly portrayed, from the initial interchange with Cornelius and Valtemand to the co-optation of Laertes’s grief and the enlisting of Laertes as Hamlet’s killer, as one characterized by the persistent deployment of agents to act on his behalf. As Claudius’s use of Laertes’s desire for vengeance on the murderer of his father suggests, it is, furthermore, marked by the intermixing of civil and familial allegiances. As Anthony DiMatteo argues, “Shakespeare’s audiences are repeatedly invited to place questions of sovereignty and dominion within a conflicting framework of natural, civil, and divine allegiances” (4). Perhaps in no other play in Shakespeare’s canon are the realms of the personal and the political so thoroughly intermixed as they are in Hamlet. Polonius, who, as discussed below, treats his family as if they were subjects under his surveillance, is just one of many examples of the way in which the characters and events of Hamlet blur the line between the personal and the political. The initial act that sets the play in motion – Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet – is simultaneously fratricide and regicide. Similarly, Hamlet avenges both the murder of a

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3 It is further important to note that, juxtaposed with the previous scene’s declarations of allegiance, which are framed in terms of medieval social relations – i.e. Marcellus’s description of the group as “liegemen to the Dane” – this scene offers a markedly modern vision of royal power and authority, in which a personal allegiance to the King is replaced by a professional one.
father and of a king. Though they present themselves as friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are, in fact, employees of the state. Claudius turns Laertes’s rage at the death of his father to his political advantage in an attempt to have Hamlet, who is both a wronged son and a political rival, killed.

For those who function within the state bureaucracy – Claudius, Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – this intermingling of the personal and the political results invariably in the subordination of personal relationships to the demands of political expediency. Furthermore, in this play, as in *Sejanus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, bureaucratic selfhood is evacuated selfhood, and standing in for the monarch becomes the bureaucrat’s primary mode of existing in society.

Given this context, it is worth noting the way in which the king’s functionaries in *Hamlet* die. As discussed in Chapter Three, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are killed as the result of Hamlet’s forging their death warrants and substituting them for his own. Their deaths, perhaps appropriately for characters whose personalities seem not to have any sort of autonomy, either from their monarch or from each other, men who, as Hamlet puts it, “did make love to [their] employment” (5.2.58), occur offstage, reported by Hamlet and then again, ironically, by an ambassador. Royal emissaries unwittingly bearing the orders for their execution, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in life and in death, are defined by the work that they do.

Polonius also makes love to his employment, so to speak. Every aspect of Polonius’s life is defined by his work for Claudius. Indeed, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his death is brought about by his employment. Furthermore, all three men die, appropriately, in place of someone else. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die after
replacing Hamlet as the objects of the death sentence that they carry. Polonius’s death, too, is a standing-in. Upon realizing that he has killed someone, Hamlet asks, “Is it the King?” (3.4.25). In the logic of bureaucracy – confusingly, though not wholly inaccurately, explicated by Dogberry to the Watch – Hamlet’s question is not off-base. Polonius, watching Hamlet at the King’s behest, is behind the arras in the place of Claudius; thus he “presents” the King, to use Dogberry’s term (*Much Ado* 3.3.66). Polonius, who watches Hamlet on behalf of the King, is in turn killed by Hamlet in Claudius’s stead.

II

“Deformed” Villains: Deceiving the Disciplinary Gaze

In an attempt to enforce allegiance to the state, the English crown has required that its subjects swear oaths of allegiance since the Norman invasion of 1066. The value of such assertions of allegiance was, however, difficult to ascertain. The problem of differentiating between honest performances of fealty and dishonest ones is, ironically, testified to by the many and varied types of oaths of allegiance demanded of citizens of early modern England. It is, furthermore, a problem dramatized in the figure of Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

As readers of *Much Ado About Nothing* know, the “Deformed” mentioned in the first epigraph of this chapter, who haunts the policing scenes of the play, is a figment. He is not so much a figment of the imagination of the Watch as he is a figment of their investigation. The thief, “Deformed,” comes into existence when the Watch mishears

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Borachio, who says to Conrad, “But seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?” (3.3.108-09). At issue when the “villain” is inadvertently called into being is the connection, in a person, between style and substance. In an attempt to instruct Conrad on the problems inherent in placing stock in appearances, Borachio explains to Conrad that “the fashion of a doublet, or a hat, or a cloak is nothing to a man” (3.3.103-04). Borachio’s declaration, of course, prefigures Hamlet’s claim, when he takes to the stage a couple of years later, to “have that within which passeth show” (1.2.85). Though Borachio’s denunciation of “fashion” has not received the sort of critical interest that Hamlet’s claim to interiority has, I believe that it may offer useful contextualization for Hamlet’s later exploration of managed inscrutability.

Of course, Borachio is not particularly interested in inscrutability. On the contrary, his concern is with the visible and readable, with the performance of selfhood. Rather than simply passing show, Borachio’s fashioning is an active gesture of disguise. That is, while Hamlet seems to conceive of his interiority as innately impenetrable, Borachio understands the hiding of the “true” interior self as a deliberate reaction to external observation.

Borachio’s vision of “fashioned” identity calls to mind Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning, in which Greenblatt examines the way in which, in early modern English society, identities were, as the title suggests, self-consciously fashioned in response to a combination of social pressures and social freedoms. According to Greenblatt, “Self-fashioning […] involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self—God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military administration” (9). Thus, like Borachio, Greenblatt’s
self-fashioned subjects (in the sense, primarily though not exclusively, of subjection to
authority), are eminently aware of the matrices of authority that surround them and
against and through which they construct their identities. However, Don John, the model
of fashion about whom Borachio is speaking, is not really the sort of socially mobile,
linguistically dexterous subject of authority about whom Greenblatt writes. This is not to
say that he does not deploy language as a tool in ways which are, at times, strikingly
similar to the self-fashioned subject, but rather that his goal in fashioning himself is, first
and foremost, the subversion of his brother’s authority rather than submission to it in
anything but the most superficial ways. As such, Don John falls outside of this dominant
paradigm of early modern subject formation and warrants further attention.

Don John’s first thought seems always to be a calculation of the manner in which
a situation might be manipulated in order to attack Don Pedro or to attack him by proxy
through the gulling of Claudio. Upon first hearing Borachio’s “intelligence of an
intended marriage” (1.3.35-36), Don John’s immediate reaction is to begin scheming:
“Will it serve for any model to build mischief on?” (1.3.37). Similarly, upon the
announcement of Claudio’s engagement to Hero, Don John announces that “Any bar, any
cross, any impediment will be medicinable to me” (2.2.4-5). The plot requires that Don
John “fashion” himself as a friend to Claudio and as loyal to Don Pedro, a performance
of the sort of submission that Greenblatt identifies as intrinsic to the act of self-
fashioning.

It should be noted, however, that Don John’s submission is doubly falsified.
First, as discussed above, it is a deliberate, self-conscious performance whose only
objective is the duping of Don Pedro and Claudio. Furthermore, the play is framed by
two references to Don John’s submission to his brother’s authority: the ending, in which he is chased, apprehended, and promised torture, and the beginning, in which his acceptance into Messinean society is predicated on his obedience to Don Pedro.

Leonato’s welcome to Don John makes clear the terms upon which he is allowed entrance: “Being reconciled to the Prince your brother, I owe you all duty” (1.1.125-26). Thus, even if Don John’s submission to Don Pedro’s authority were genuine, it could not be voluntary.

The linking of Don John’s submission to institutional authority, as it manifests itself in his brother, with explicitly coercive disciplinary tactics such as torture and the threat of social ostracism, raises a problem for disciplinary authority as it functions in the play. A society which polices itself through observation in the way that Messina does in Much Ado About Nothing relies on its subjects’ awareness of being watched, or at least of the ever-present possibility that they are being watched. However, it also reveals to the subjects precisely the terms on which they are being judged. Appear to be behaving, the system seems to imply, and, absent any evidence to the contrary, you will be treated as though you were.

Thus, a statement such as Leonato’s contingent welcome to Don John, while underscoring the tenuous nature of Don John’s position in Don Pedro’s company, also draws attention to a potential anxiety in Leonato, which he masks with an iteration of the structure of authority to which Don John must submit. Indeed, the apparent incongruity between Don John’s crime, the slander of Hero, and the proposed penalty of Benedick’s “brave punishments” (5.4.122) gestures towards a larger transgression, of which the

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5 The dangling participle makes this passage somewhat unclear – it is, of course, Don John, not Leonato, who has been reconciled to the Prince.
gulling of Claudio and Don Pedro is merely a symptom. Leonato’s statement further characterizes Don John’s reformation as an ongoing process, as if the reconciliation must be vigilantly policed in order for it to be maintained. Thus Don John’s submission is tacitly acknowledged by Leonato to be, at least potentially, incomplete, if not completely fictional.

This apparent cognizance on an authority figure’s behalf of the forced nature of his subject’s (and, by extension, his subjects’) submission to authority draws attention to the way in which it is impossible to differentiate between deliberately misleading performances of submission and “genuine” (though not necessarily voluntary) acts of submission. Indeed, given that there does not seem to be a viable alternative for Don John, and when read in conjunction to the way in which Hero is (temporarily) cast out of society for transgressions against the patriarchal order, this interchange serves as an indication of the way in which all such acts of submission must necessarily be understood as coerced.

It is not, then, simply Don Pedro and Claudio who are gulled by Don John. As his presence at Leonato’s is supposedly contingent on his being something that he is not, Don John also gulls Leonato, and the disciplinary authority that he represents. Rather than reformation through the application of authority, in Don John, the play presents, to use Borachio’s formulation, de-formation. In this way, “fashion,” which is to say the calculated (and thus, in the calculus of the play, inauthentic) performance of loyalty, is indeed the “Deformed” villain sought out and punished in Much Ado About Nothing.

Of course, “fashion” in Much Ado does not simply denote a process of feigning identity; as Conrad succinctly states, “it is apparel” (3.3.105). And indeed, in addition to
the putting on of identity, there are a number of instances of more conventional
disguisings in the play. Hero is wooed by Don Pedro while he is in disguise (and,
notably, she is wooed by one man on behalf of another); Claudio is twice gulled by
disguises, first by Don John at the masquerade, and then, albeit unwittingly, by a
disguised Margaret; and, finally, Claudio agrees to wed a disguised Hero, thinking her to
be someone else. Thus the primary love plot is begun, twice stymied, and happily
concluded all while at least one of the major participants is either disguised, or someone
else is disguised as them. So fashion, in terms of apparel, is simultaneously enabling and
misleading in the play.

In fact, identity in the play is not simply fashioned in terms of behaviour, but also
in terms of apparel. The mistaking of Margaret for Hero is the result of a misrecognition
of clothing as a stable signifier of identity. Indeed, the word “fashion” in the play
invokes a number of related issues surrounding disguise and clothing.

Furthermore, the connection of fashion and the law evokes the various Sumptuary
Statutes issued in England from as early as 1362, statutes which, as Marjorie Garber
argues, work to “mark out as visible and above all legible distinctions of wealth and rank
within a society undergoing changes that threatened to blur or even obliterate such
distinctions” (26). Sumptuary laws attempt to forge a direct connection between
appearance and “reality.” In doing so, however, they assert the contrary. That is, a stable
connection between the visible and the invisible – between attire and social rank or
between behaviour and disposition, for instance – continues to prove elusive even as
legislation asserts the state’s right and ability to understand its subjects in terms of this
connection. Most important for the purposes of this chapter is the way in which Garber’s
emphasis on the social desire for “legible” subjects underscores the link in early modern England between identity and legally encoded description.  

III

“Infolded” Texts: Secret Writing and Secret Languages

Given the state’s investment in being able to see, and to interpret, its subjects, it is thus not surprising to find that anxieties arise concerning the connection between exterior appearance and interior content of the sort that underlie Sumptuary laws. At the same time, it is not surprising that a number of strategies designed to limit the state’s attempts to assure uncomplicated observation of its subjects arise as well.

For instance, the seventeenth century saw a marked increase in the public discussion of the use of encryption to conceal the content of correspondence. Early in the century, Francis Bacon, one-time member of the Earl of Essex’s privately maintained spy network, wrote of the use of ciphers in *The Advancement of Learning*,

For Ciphers, they are commonly in letters or alphabets, but may be in words. The kinds of Ciphers (besides the simple ciphers with changes and intermixtures of nulls and insignificants) are many, according to the nature or rule of the infolding; Wheel-ciphers, Key-ciphers, Doubles, &c. But the virtues of them, whereby they are to be preferred, are three; that they be not laborious to write and read; that they be impossible to decipher; and, in some cases, that they be without suspicion. The highest degree whereof is to write ‘omnia per omnia’; which is undoubtedly possible,

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6 For a history of sumptuary statutes and their enforcement, or lack thereof, see Frances Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1926).
with a proportion quintuple at most of the writing infolding to the writing infolded, and no other restraint altogether. (232)

The last type of cipher, in which the “infolded,” which is to say hidden, writing must be one fifth the length of the “infolding” writing, or, in the common terms of cryptography, the ciphertext, is still referred to as Bacon’s “Biliteral Cipher,” though he himself generally referred to it as the “Biliterary” Cipher. In De Augmentis Scientiarium, the 1623 Latin edition and expansion of The Advancement of Learning, Bacon is more specific about the nature of his cipher. Essentially, it consists of the use of two different typefaces or scripts to create a series of five-digit “binary numbers” with the main typeface or script being represented by “a” and the alternate typeface by “b.” Each of these binary numbers represents a letter of the alphabet (Fig. 2). Thus, any message can be encoded into any piece of writing, so long as the original piece of writing is at least five times as long as the hidden message.

7 A number of cryptologists sympathetic to the idea that Bacon was the true author of the works of Shakespeare have analyzed the printing of the First Folio in the hopes of finding a message from Bacon hidden in the text. One such analysis claimed to find a statement written by Bacon in his Biliteral Cipher claiming authorship not only of Shakespeare’s canon, but also of the works of Jonson, Burton, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and Spenser. The “decryption” also revealed Bacon’s status as one of Elizabeth’s illegitimate children (the other being Essex), not to mention hitherto unpublished translations of both the Iliad and the Odyssey. For an extensive discussion of the Baconians’ attempts to “decode” Shakespeare’s works, see Fletcher Pratt, Secret and Urgent: The Story of Codes and Ciphers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939) 83-117.

8 The term “binary numbers” is in quotation marks for two reasons. First, and most obviously, Bacon’s “numbers” are composed of the letters “a” and “b” and are thus not really numbers in the traditional sense. Second, Bacon’s cipher is significant in terms of the history of mathematics, in that binary numbers – the numbering system based entirely on 1 and 0, rather than the conventional decimal system which is based on the numbers 0 through 9 – were officially “invented” by Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz in 1671 – almost 50 years after Bacon published his cipher in De Augmentis Scientiarium.

9 For example, the following sentence contains a message encrypted in the Biliteral Cipher:
The advantage of the Biliteral Cipher is twofold. First, it is relatively innocuous. Unless one is looking for variations in typeface, which, as Fletcher Pratt points out, were common in contemporary works as the result of printers replacing worn letters with letters of another type for reasons of economy (91), one is unlikely to notice the sporadic appearance of individual letters in a slightly different typeface. Also, even if one were to notice the alternation of types, the letters indicated by the alternate typeface appear to be an encryption unto themselves, and the would-be decoder may be left with a series of meaningless letters.

Interestingly, Bacon’s own cipher, which he exalted as “the highest degree” of encryption, is relatively simple to decrypt, once one understands the process. This would seem to contradict his claim that ciphers ought to “be impossible to decipher.” On the
contrary, Bacon’s cipher is remarkably static (and thus prone to unanticipated and unwanted deciphering), as opposed to the ciphers used by others at the time.

This brings up an interesting issue surrounding the use of ciphers in the seventeenth century. For the most part, those who used them seemed convinced of their impenetrability. As Potter notes of royalists whose letters were intercepted during the Interregnum, “even when a packet of royalist correspondence was seized in 1658, the authors did not think themselves in danger, since ‘every different Person’s Letter was written in a distinct Cypher, and that contrived with great Thought’” (41). As ciphers seemed to be predominantly personal, those who wrote in them counted on the privacy of their own thought processes to protect them from detection. As Potter notes, the belief in the sanctity of one’s personal cipher stemmed in large part from the fact that “the very existence of a science of cryptology was not taken seriously […] until very late” in the Interregnum (41). Indeed, the science was a relatively new one in England, as the first English book on the topic of encryption and decryption, John Wilkins’s *Mercury, The Secret and Swift Messenger*, was not published until 1641. Wilkins was a mathematician and a clergyman, and would be, after the Restoration, one of the founders of the Royal

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10 The idea that ciphers existed that could only be unlocked by a specific person, as the result of their own idiosyncratic “Thought,” recalls the scene in *Twelfth Night* in which Malvolio comes across the letter that has deliberately been left for him by Maria and Sir Toby: “‘M.O.A.I.’ This simulation is not as the former; and yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name” (2.5.122-23). Malvolio’s act of deciphering requires a certain amount of “crushing” in order to make the initials of the letter denote him. That is, in order for the cipher to be interpreted, correctly, as “Malvolio,” it must be read by Malvolio himself, whose egotism leads him to recognize himself in the declarations of love. In this way, the cipher is perfectly rendered and is indeed created in such a way that it can only be interpreted by the person for whom it is intended.
Society. In *Mercury*, he argues along the same lines as Bacon, to whom he refers as “our
*English Aristotle,*” (6) about the requisite conditions for secret communication:

1. That it be difficult to be unfolded, if it should be doubted of, or
   examined

2. That it be (if possible) altogether devoid of Suspicion; for so
   far as it is liable to this, it may be said to come short in the very Nature of
   Secrecy. (7)

This second condition is interesting in that it disqualifies as secret any piece of
information whose existence is known, whether or not the information itself is made
public. This would seem to run counter to Richard Rambuss’s claim in *Spenser’s Secret
Career* that secrecy is, in essence performative, that is, that the power obtained from the
possession of secrets is obtained through making public the existence of the secret,
though not the content thereof. Potter also distinguishes between public and private
secrecy (38), though her definitions of each seem, initially, to lean towards Wilkins’s use
of the term.11 In a discussion of *Mercury*, however, she acknowledges the important
distinction “between the kind of encoding which is self-evidently secret and the kind
which is so secret that it conceals even the fact that it is a code” (38).

This discrepancy can be traced to the context in which each of these assertions
about secrecy is being made. Rambuss’s examination of secretarial secrecy discusses the
way in which secretaries, and Spenser in particular, gain power by drawing attention to
the secrets that they bear. However, it is crucial in this formulation that the information

11 Potter draws a distinction between clandestine works which were circulated
secretly among royal sympathizers and what she calls “secret language,” or encryption.
In both cases, the existence of the secret was obscured along with the message itself (38).
protected by the secretary is not the secretary’s own secret, but rather that of his master. Thus, the secretary’s self-evident secrecy, to use Potter’s term, is, as discussed in Chapter Three, a potential threat to the secretary’s master. The secretary functions within a system that maintains itself through the management and circulation of information, and any capital to which the secretary lays claim is the direct result of being able to gain access to this information. Furthermore, the secretary has no personal investment in the specific content of the information that he conveys. Conversely, the subject of disciplinary state authority maintains (or attempts to assert) power by retaining information, by possessing data that are inaccessible to the state.

Indeed, advertising one’s possession of information or knowledge that is inaccessible to the state can mark one as an outlaw. Take, for example, the much-studied cony-catching literature of the late Elizabethan period. Like a number of these pamphlets, Thomas Harman’s *A Caveat for Common Cursetors*, originally published in 1567, includes a glossary of thieves’ cant, the language of the Elizabethan underworld. As Janet Sorensen notes of sixteenth-century cony-catching pamphlets, “In drawing attention to thieves’ and vagabonds’ differences both from their readers and from the vulgar, upon whom they were supposed to prey, they suggest the canting crews’ separation from anything like a culture of the people” (438). Indeed, the draw of the pamphlets seems more likely to have been the exotic difference of the thieves’ argot and the subculture as a whole. Furthermore, the fact that cant is also referred to in Harman’s
work as “Pedlar’s French” gives a sense of the way in which Harman works to characterize the canting language as a foreign tongue, worthy of suspicion.12

“Cant is,” Sorensen argues, “a deliberately ‘artificial’ language seemingly without any claims to ‘natural’ national affinity” (438). The deliberate artifice of the language draws attention to its difference and, more importantly, to its opacity. Sorensen’s linking of the use of cant with questions of nationhood, or, more appropriately, with citizenship, is also informative. Not only does the use of cant separate the speaker from the general populace, but it also places him or her in direct opposition to the state.

The various editions of Harman’s pamphlet are informatively different. In the 1567 edition, the glossary is located at the end, after the descriptions of the “abominable, wicked and detestable behaviour of all these […] ragged rabblement of rascals” (Harman 1567, 3). However, when the pamphlet was reissued in 1592, it was renamed A Groundwork for Cony-Catching, presumably to cash in on the surging popularity of the genre and the order of its contents had also been changed. In the 1592 edition, the glossary comes first, and it is only after a number of pages dedicated to the explication of numerous words and phrases in cant that discussion of the actual “cozenages” begins. In this way, the 1592 edition underscores the significance of the thieves’ use of a secret language. By highlighting the thieves’ use of cant, the pamphlet links the use of secret or arcane languages with a deliberate resistance to disciplinary state authority. However,

12 Harman, a justice of the peace, whose pamphlet advertises itself as a warning to the general populace against the dangers of cant speakers, was himself incorporated into thieves’ cant. In Thomas Dekker’s Lanthorne and Candle-light (1612), as well as in the 1592 edition of Harman’s own pamphlet, the word “harman” is used to denote a number of negative forms of legal interference. See H. T. Webster, “The Canting Language: Some Notes on Old Underworld Slang,” College English 4 (1943): 230-235.
other changes incorporated into the 1592 edition, in conjunction with the re-ordering, convey a very specific message about the end result of such resistance.

This message can be seen in changes to the frontispiece. All of the editions of the pamphlet are accompanied by a woodcut frontispiece. In the 1567 edition, the frontispiece portrays two men, presumably “cursitors,” who are tied to a wagon and guarded (Fig. 3). The 1573 edition elaborates somewhat on the original, adding what appears to be blood on the two men (Fig. 4). Furthermore, the scene is accompanied, in the 1573 edition, by a poem which explicates it:

This Cart at his tail doth draw all about,

Such pilfering pickers, that to it is tied:

The whip with his whisks, the blood fetcheth out,

The Bawds for bawdery, and Whores therein ride. (1)

The image is thus quite easily understood as depicting a scene of punishment, contributing to the “Caveat” of the title. The message seems to be, simply, that those who engage in the behaviour described in the pamphlet will be punished for their transgressions.

While the frontispiece for the 1573 edition merely added to the original image, the frontispiece for the 1592 edition is a different image altogether (Fig. 5). Borrowing its imagery (and indeed one of its figures) from the frontispiece to Robert Greene’s very popular cony-catching pamphlet *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage* (1591), the image depicts a number of “conies” engaged in various scams, from card and dice play, to pickpocketing, to what appears, in the bottom right-hand corner, to be highway robbery. Unlike the first two frontispieces, which portray, with increasing explicitness, only the
outcome of breaking the law, this image dedicates its lower two thirds to the representation of the acts of transgression themselves. In fact, there is no direct representation of punishment in the image at all.

This is not to say, however, that punishment does not figure in the image. On the contrary, the upper third of the image is dedicated, in large part, to images of the tools of punishment. In the centre, there appears to be a whip of the sort that appears on the earlier frontispiece. To the left of the whip is an empty scaffold, looming ominously over the illegal acts which go on below it. Tying the image together is a figure in the upper right-hand corner who sits and watches the action below him. The figure’s apparel seems to mark him as a magistrate of some sort, an interpretation supported by a line of text which sits directly above the image: “Done by a Justice of Peace of great authority, who hath had the examining of divers of them” (1). The “Justice of Peace” referred to is Harman, the author, but the statement serves as a key for interpreting the image as well. The image presents a narrative, moving from the commission of various crimes to their inevitable discovery and ultimate punishment. Justice, in the person of the seated magistrate, sees all, no matter how subtly the cozenages are carried out.

The image thus communicates a message of laying bare, of making visible what was thought to be invisible. Moving the cant glossary from the end of the pamphlet to the beginning works in the same way. It is an announcement that the secret language of the thieves is known to the authorities. Furthermore, moving the glossary to the beginning of the text seems to be an acknowledgement of the fundamental importance of secret language to the construction and maintenance of a subculture that depends on eluding detection and capture for its survival. It is an attempt to re-inscribe the thieves’
Fig. 3. Frontispiece, *A Caveat for Common Cursetors* (1567)

Fig. 4. Frontispiece, *A Caveat for Common Cursetors* (1573)
discourse into the dominant, national language and thus to deprive it of its power as a secret language. It is perhaps for this reason that the magistrate figure at the top of the 1592 frontispiece can be seen holding a book and reaching, it appears, with a writing implement in his right hand in order literally to inscribe the language of the thieves. At the same time, the right hand gestures towards the implements of punishment, thus linking the recording of the canting language with the eventual punishment and elimination, by hanging, of the criminal underclass.
IV
“Unfold yourself”: *Hamlet* and the Bureaucratic Subject

The opening of *Hamlet* takes on added significance in the context of these discourses of secrecy and encryption. In response to “Who’s there?” (1.1.1), Barnardo’s indecorous\(^{13}\) question with which the play opens, Francisco replies, “Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself” (2). Francisco’s command that Barnardo “unfold” himself is significant in a number of ways. First, as with the cryptological use of the term, “unfolding” here indicates an acknowledgement of a “true” identity hidden beneath an obscuring exterior. Thus, from its outset, the play signals its abiding interest in mechanisms of concealment, especially as they relate to conceptions of identity. More important for the purposes of this chapter, however, is the way in which this interest is signalled. Francisco’s instruction to Barnardo characterizes Barnardo as something to be read, as a text to be interpreted. Or, rather, Barnardo is charged with interpreting himself.

Francisco is not alone in the play in his use of references to textuality to characterize selfhood. Personal interaction in *Hamlet* is repeatedly represented in terms of documents. Two characters, above all, return on a relatively regular basis to this vocabulary of documentation: Polonius and Hamlet.

The first words that Polonius speaks in the play are marked by a tendency to view the world as if it were constituted by documents. Describing discussions with his son, Laertes, regarding Laertes’s return to France, Polonius tells Claudius, “He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave / By laboursome petition, and at last / Upon his will I

\(^{13}\) It is indecorous in that it is Francisco, as sentry on duty, who is charged with questioning anyone who is out. Barnardo is not yet on duty, and is thus not yet authorized to interrogate others, hence Francisco’s rebuke in the following line. It is worth noting that the play opens with a misuse of delegated authority, however minor.
sealed my hard consent” (1.2.58-60). Though, if taken singly, the words “petition,”
“will,” and “sealed” seem innocuous enough, the use of all three by Polonius in the space
of one sentence points towards a certain way of understanding the world. Furthermore,
Polonius’s rhetoric establishes him as jaded and unable to experience emotion in a
manner that is not mediated by his employment. Polonius’s viewpoint is further clarified
in an exchange with Ophelia on the topic of Hamlet’s romantic interest in her. Playing
on Ophelia’s description of Hamlet’s having “made many tenders / Of his affection” to
her (1.4.99-100), Polonius begins by describing Hamlet’s seduction of Ophelia in
economic terms. However, his metaphors shift briefly in his speech from the economic
to the political: “Set your entreatments at a higher rate / Than a command to parley”
(122-23). Thus, Polonius demonstrates the way in which the language of documents that
surfaces in his speech is bound up in an understanding of the world that is dominated by
an interest (and an investment) in statecraft.

This is perhaps appropriate for a man in Polonius’s position. Of course, what
Polonius’s position is in Claudius’s court is, as Bernice Kliman notes, less than clear:

Since the 1676 Quarto—the first edition to list “The Persons
Represented”—named Polonius “Lord Chamberlain,” many editors have
followed suit. But there is no good reason to give him that title. The
authoritative texts, which have no list of persons represented, never refer
to him as anything but a counselor. […] John Dover Wilson […] assumes
that Polonius is the “Principal Secretary of State” rather than Lord
Chamberlain, but both titles seem too grand. (5)
Though the specifics of Polonius’s position are not explicit, his role seems roughly commensurate with that of Hieronimo in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*. Indeed, Claudius characterizes Polonius to Laertes in a way that is markedly similar to the way in which the King of Spain describes Hieronimo, a topic discussed in Chapter Two: “The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father” (1.2.46-48). Indeed, like Hieronimo, Polonius plays a role in disciplinary aspects of statecraft as well. Specifically, he helps to orchestrate the surveillance of Hamlet. After Claudius and Gertrude have engaged Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to observe Hamlet, Polonius proposes a cause for Hamlet’s behaviour, namely that he is lovesick for Ophelia. In order to prove his theory, Polonius arranges for the clandestine surveillance of Hamlet by himself and Claudius: “At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him. / [To CLAUDIUS] Be you and I behind an arras then. / Mark the encounter” (2.2.163-65).

This is not the only moment in the play in which Polonius either engages in or arranges for intelligence-gathering. Upon first hearing from Ophelia of Hamlet’s affection for her, Polonius immediately determines that he should inform Claudius: “Come, go we to the King. / This must be known, which, being kept close, might move / More grief to hide than hate to utter love” (2.1.118-20). It is telling that, upon learning of Hamlet’s “tenders” of affection, Polonius’s reaction is to report what he has learned to the King. Indeed, Polonius’s characteristically convoluted speech allows for some ambiguity as to what the cause of the grief should be. It is possible that he is referring to the danger of allowing Ophelia to continue her liaison with Hamlet, despite the fact that he is, in Polonius’s words, “out of [her] star” (2.2.141). However, Polonius’s statement
emphasizes the danger of keeping the information secret. As such, it may be an
acknowledgement of his professional duty to pass on any information that he gathers to
the King, no matter how personal.

Though Polonius’s spying on his daughter may, in the context of his duty to
Claudius, be understood to be a professional rather than a personal act, it is difficult to
make the same claim for his similar treatment of Laertes. When Polonius hires Reynaldo
to spy on Laertes he does not ask, simply, that Reynaldo observe Laertes passively. On
the contrary, he instructs Reynaldo to slander Laertes. Confused, Reynaldo interjects, in
search of an explanation:

REYNALDO       But, my good lord—

POLONIUS     Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO       Ay, my lord

I would know that.

POLONIUS       Marry, sir, here’s my drift,

And I believe it is a fetch of warrant:

You laying these slight sullies on my son,

As ’twere a thing a little soiled i’th’ working,

Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound,

Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes

The youth you breathe of guilty […] (2.1.36-44)

Polonius’s parental concern seems to dovetail with his professional practice. Indeed, this
method of investigation, in which one may, in Polonius’s phrase, “By indirections find
directions out” (2.1.65), is similar to the one used in the investigations of Hamlet, at
whose outset Polonius states, “If circumstances lead me I will find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed / Within the centre” (2.2.158-60). Furthermore, like Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, and as elsewhere in the play, the very language that Polonius uses is again influenced by his employment. In addition its bureaucratic tone, Polonius’s parenting offers another way in which critics have linked him to state service. What is probably Polonius’s most famous act of parenting – the “few precepts” that he imparts to Laertes in anticipation of Laertes’s departure for France (1.3.58) – has also led critics to comment on his similarity to a specific Elizabethan administrator: William Cecil.

Claims for a connection between Cecil and Polonius have been supported by, among other things, a comparison of Polonius’ fatherly advice to Laertes and Cecil’s series of similar precepts, composed in 1584 and eventually published under the titles *Counsel of a father to his son, in ten several precepts, left as a legacy at his death* (1611) and *Certain Precepts, or Directions, for the Well-Ordering and Carriage of a Man’s Life* (1617). The greatest support for this position comes from those who hold that the connection between William Cecil and Polonius is evidence that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the true author of Shakespeare’s canon.14 The crux of the Oxfordian argument is that, since Cecil’s *Counsel* was not published until 1611, Shakespeare could not have had access to it in his composition of *Hamlet*, while de Vere, Cecil’s son-in-law, would have read the precepts in manuscript form. Given the popularity of the “fatherly

advice” genre, though, definitively identifying Cecil’s Precepts as the source for Polonius’s advice seems a difficult, if not impossible, task.\(^{15}\)

This is not to say that Polonius’s speech is not reminiscent of the work of one of the Cecils. I would like to argue that the advice evokes the work not of William, but of Robert Cecil. Specifically, I believe that the ethos of detachment espoused by Polonius (“Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar,” “Give every man thine ear but few thy voice,” “Take each man’s censure, but reserve thy judgement,” “Neither a borrower nor a lender be” (1.3.60, 68, 69, 75)) draws on the same sort of ethics propounded by Robert Cecil’s The State and Dignitie of a Secretarie of Estates Place, in which Cecil advocates maintaining a detached attitude towards the demands and desires of other people.\(^{16}\) In this way, Polonius’s advice to his son, though it is not directly derived from Cecil’s treatise, certainly promotes the same virtues that Cecil holds as ideal for employees of the state.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{15}\) For English examples, see James I, The Fathers Blessing, or Second Councell to his Sonne (London, 1616) and Louis B. Wright, Advice to a Son: Precepts of Lord Burghley, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Francis Osborne (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1962). Continental examples of the advice genre include the opening dialogue of Balthassare Castiglione’s Il Libro del Cortegiano (1528) or Giovanni Della Casa, Il Galateo (1555). On the related topic of motherly advice, see Sylvia Brown, ed., Women’s Writing in Stuart England: The Mothers’ Legacies of Dorothy Leigh, Elizabeth Joscelin and Elizabeth Richardson (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1999).

\(^{16}\) See Chapter Two, pages 42-44.

Ultimately, though, these extra-textual resemblances only serve to underscore the administrative roots of the play’s own construction of Polonius as almost obsessively prone to understanding the world as constituted by documents, a characteristic that he shares with Hamlet. There is, however, a significant difference between the two men’s understanding of the world in which they find themselves. While Polonius’s characterization of people and things as text is predominantly directed outwards – that is, he tends to characterize others as texts rather than himself – Hamlet repeatedly draws on images of text to describe himself. For example, in his lecture to his mother on the difference between “seeming” and “being,” Hamlet describes his clothing as an “inky cloak” (1.2.77). Later, in preparing to confront his mother, he states: “My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites – / How in my words somever she be shent, / To give them seals never my soul consent” (3.3.367-69). As before, Hamlet characterizes himself as a document – notably a false one.

It is during Hamlet’s first interaction with the Ghost that this self-conception is voiced most fully. Upon being instructed to “remember” the ghost, Hamlet replies,

Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain […] (1.5.97-103)
This passage emphasizes the way in which Hamlet conceives of himself as text. Furthermore, it expresses a belief, on Hamlet’s behalf in his identity having been formed by his exposure to texts. As Jonathan Goldberg argues, in his essay “Hamlet’s Hand,” “In these lines, subjectivity is a scene of writing” (111). Significantly, though, and perhaps most crucially for understanding the different ways in which Hamlet and Polonius relate to their “textual” worlds, the passage represents the “text” of Hamlet as having been imposed upon him. It is not Hamlet’s writing, but that of others that constitutes his subjectivity: first his identity consists of “copied” texts, and then by the ghost of his father, whose “writing” supersedes all that preceded it. Thus, while Polonius’s understanding of the world as text indicates a belief in his ability to interpret and to effect change upon it, Hamlet’s conception of his “textual” world denotes a rather different viewpoint. For Hamlet, textuality is akin to objectification – it is a state of being acted upon.

Hamlet and Polonius are also diametrically opposed in terms of their relationship to surveillance. As discussed above, Polonius repeatedly engages in or arranges for various acts of surveillance. Hamlet is, conversely, the object, again and again, of state surveillance. It is in this context that Hamlet, exasperated, exclaims to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his childhood-friends-turned-intelligencers, “You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass” (3.2.335-37). While, on the surface, Hamlet characterizes himself in the passage as a musical instrument, the images

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18 In addition to the link between memory and textuality exemplified by this passage, Stephen Greenblatt argues that the play “oddly conjoins memory […] and bureaucracy” in Hamlet’s use of his father’s seal to condemn Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death (Greenblatt 2001, 226).
that he chooses signify in multiple ways. For instance, the image of “sounding” calls to mind, in addition to music, the idea of testing depths of water, and thus would tend to characterize Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s incompetent interrogations and observations of Hamlet as a search for hidden meaning within the Prince. Similarly, when Hamlet states that his erstwhile friends “would pluck out the heart of [his] mystery” (336), the implication is that they desire to extract knowledge of his interior self. However, the characterization of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s efforts as a search for hidden truths is undermined by the fact that the predominant imagery of the larger passage is of musical instruments. That is, the images of Hamlet as a musical instrument fundamentally discredit the alternate interpretations of the images by characterizing Hamlet as an inanimate object upon whom Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seek to play. In this formulation, should Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ever happen to successfully extract information from Hamlet, though the “sound” would come from Hamlet, it would not originate with him. As the instrument of his interrogators, Hamlet can only “play” what they play upon him. In this way, Hamlet’s claims are reminiscent of Cleveland’s description of the “Cabinet-untrussers” whose “interrogation” of the King’s correspondence creates meaning which is not inherent to the correspondence, but is rather the creation of those who would find it there.

V

The Writing Subject and the Written Subject

Goldberg’s assertion that Hamlet envisions subjectivity in terms of writing is linked to his claim, in Writing Matter, that the secretary’s closet “represents the locus
through which a modern individuality emerges, with extensions to all who write” (9). 19

In this context, for Goldberg, the link between individuality and writing is an empowering one. However, in Hamlet, writing, especially as it is connected to subjectivity, is, in large part, directly linked to the bureaucratic state. Standing over a grave, Hamlet comments,

This fellow

Might be in ’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must th’inheritor himself have no more, ha? (5.1.94-102)

The above passage envisions a life in terms of property, and, more specifically, in terms of the documentary evidence of the possession of property. 20 It is not, however, only property that Hamlet sees as constituting the dead man. The monologue begins with Hamlet’s imagining that he is looking at “the skull of a lawyer,” who might proceed with “an action of battery” (5.1.91, 94). Thus the image is not simply of property, but of a subject defined by a series of interconnected social relations that are both recorded and

19 Goldberg himself notes that “Hamlet’s Hand,” in reading Shakespeare’s play in relation to early modern handwriting, offers a glimpse at his original conception for Writing Matter (Goldberg 2003, 5).

20 Furthermore, like the documents discussed in Chapter Two, these documents find themselves encased within a “box.”
maintained through the creation and circulation of documents. So, though Hamlet seems to envision his identity as constituted by writing, he simultaneously rejects a vision of a self that is constituted through the proliferation of documents. In rejecting this vision, Hamlet makes explicit a connection hinted at provocatively in L. C Hector’s *The Handwriting of English Documents* between the skin of the parchment on which legal documents are written and the skin of the people whose lives the documents describe:

HAMLET  Is not parchment made of sheepskins?

HORATIO  Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too.

HAMLET  They are sheep and calves that seek out assurance in

that […] (5.1.104-07)

Scorning the belief in a direct correlation between subjectivity and the documentation of a subject, Hamlet characterizes as fools those who would define themselves by the way in which they are documented. How then to reconcile this viewpoint with Goldberg’s argument that writing is the originary site of individuality? How does *Hamlet* negotiate between these apparently oppositional viewpoints? I believe that the play, with its constant deployment of images of writing and documents, seeks to address the question of the nature of the relationship between writing, documentation, and identity. Furthermore, I believe that it is a question which is closely tied to the play’s representation of the nature of bureaucratic subjecthood and subjectivity.

In addressing this issue, *Hamlet* differs from the other bureaucratic tragedies discussed in this dissertation, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Sejanus*. As mentioned above, *Hamlet*, like Kyd’s and Jonson’s plays, presents a society in which the political and

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21 This passage seems ironically prescient in that four centuries later much of what is known about Shakespeare himself comes from precisely these sorts of documents.
personal spheres are closely linked. The difference between the intertwining of the personal and the political in Sejanus and The Spanish Tragedy and the way in which this same intertwining functions in Hamlet is that, while Hieronimo and Sejanus believe, erroneously as it turns out, that their respective close personal relationships with their rulers allow them special privileges and access to their respective rulers, Hamlet labours under no such illusion. Indeed, it is Hamlet, whose claim to kinship with the monarch is substantially more credible than those of either Sejanus or Hieronimo, who is free of the misconception of the closeness of his relationship to the King. Hamlet knows from the beginning of the play that he has been dispossessed, and acts accordingly, while Hieronimo and Sejanus only recognize their own political powerlessness late in their respective plays. Knowing this, Hamlet operates from the outset as an outsider, while Hieronimo and Sejanus only recognize too late the fact of their removal from power. Because of this, Hamlet’s relationship to structures of power in Hamlet is in many ways much simpler on the surface, than the more complex, multivalent relationship of the bureaucrats Hieronimo and Sejanus to their respective states. Thus, Hamlet deploys strategies of resistance and disorientation against the very power structures that the other two characters buttress until the moment at which they recognize the fact that their interests and the state’s interest no longer coincide.

Interestingly, though, Hamlet’s motives in the play seem to be totally removed from the political sphere. Though he is perhaps the one figure in the play in whom the merging of the personal and the political makes sense, Hamlet remains driven not by a desire for justice in a legal sense, but by the need for personal revenge. This is not to say, however, that Hamlet’s revenge is not in any way political. Indeed, though the state is
not the ultimate target of Hamlet’s revenge, the way in which Claudius’s governance is structured provides the means by which Hamlet acts against Claudius throughout most of the play. Most obviously, Hamlet’s assault on the state takes the form of his unsystematic, though undeniably effective, killing of the majority of its employees in the play. By killing first Polonius then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet removes from Claudius some of the means by which he administers his state. However, these killings are not the only way in which Hamlet performs his defiance of the bureaucratic structures of state authority at work in the play. Indeed, they are a late manifestation of an antagonism that has been in evidence since Hamlet’s first appearance in the play.

Hamlet’s famous claim to inscrutability in the second scene of the play seems, on the one hand, not to be particularly well-founded, given that, though Hamlet’s black clothes are “but the trappings and the suits of woe” (86), they are nonetheless an accurate reflection of “that within,” of his melancholic disposition at the outset of the play. On the other hand, by constructing himself as a hidden text beneath an “inky cloak,” Hamlet offers an image of himself as an encrypted message, the key to which is unavailable to his antagonists. Like Bacon’s Biliteral Cipher, Hamlet’s encrypted self is written “omnia per omnia,” as the explicit meaning of his attire is indistinguishable for observers from the hidden meaning underneath. Though this embracing of the conception of the self as text would seem to contradict other moments in the play at which Hamlet denounces the equation of selfhood and textuality, Hamlet’s combining of discourses of secrecy and textuality offers a challenge to the hegemonic power of the bureaucratic state. There is, however, a significant difference between Bacon’s code and Hamlet’s claim.
In terms of types of dissembling, the Biliteral Cipher is closer to Don John’s mode of self-representation than it is to Hamlet’s. That is, the Biliteral Cipher is specifically designed to obscure the very fact of its existence. Like Don John’s false reconciliation to his brother, the cipher functions because it gives virtually no external indication that there is a secret subtext to discover. On the contrary, Hamlet advertises his inscrutability incessantly; in his conversations with his mother, with Claudius and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as well as in his very public performance of insanity, Hamlet invites investigation by claiming imperviousness to it. Like the thieves of Harman’s cony-catching pamphlet, Hamlet advertises his resistance to state power by performing his potential inscrutability. Furthermore, like Harman’s thieves, Hamlet marks himself as opposed to the state by adopting the very terms by which the state attempts to exert control. In this way, Hamlet’s “antic disposition” (2.1.173), is yet another way in which Hamlet’s revenge manifests itself as an attack on the way in which Claudius governs. Undermining the supervisory disciplinary authority that is so much in evidence throughout Hamlet, Hamlet refuses to be “documented.” Refusing to allow his body to be “legible” (26), to use Marjorie Garber’s term, Hamlet denies the state’s right to transform him, through surveillance and documentation, into text.

The alignment in Hamlet of bodies and texts has been prefigured, both in the Elizabethan theatre and in this dissertation, by The Spanish Tragedy. One of the most striking early modern depictions of connections between the body and the bureaucratic encoding of texts occurs in Kyd’s play. Ironically, this connection appears in Bel-Imperia’s letter, which is, as discussed in Chapter Three, significant for its markedly un-
bureaucratic nature.\textsuperscript{22} Underscoring the absurdity of Hieronimo’s doubt, and of Bel-Imperia’s inability to make herself present to Hieronimo through her letter, is the fact that she is literally present in the letter, as she has written it with her own blood. Circulating through her letter, as it had previously circulated through her body, the bloody script draws attention to ways in which the document, its exterior display alternately complicated or complemented by its secret interior, functions in works about administration as an analogue of the body. At the same time, though, Bel-Imperia’s letter seeks unsuccessfully to transcend the bureaucratic context in which it is read. It is an attempt to counteract the depersonalization of writing that Ethan Knapp argues is fundamental to the creation of bureaucratic documents. Knapp argues, of the bureaucratic writings of Hoccleve, that “It is the imperative to rid the bureaucratic text of subjectivity itself that makes subjectivity into a recognizable and separable literary topos” (13). It is interesting then that over a century and a half after Hoccleve’s death the opposite trajectory should appear in writings which concern themselves with bureaucracy. In response to the bureaucratic “writing-out” of the self, characters in works by Jonson, Kyd, and Shakespeare attempt some sort of redress by reinserting themselves, whether physically or figuratively, into texts from which they find themselves excluded, by attempting to assert the primacy of personal relations over professional or political relations, and by transgressing against traditional boundaries of secrecy and convention in order to take part in a system from which they find themselves excluded. Of course, it is worth noting that the majority of these figures are unsuccessful

\textsuperscript{22} See Chapter Three, pages 74-76.
in their attempts to “re-write” their stories, as the example of Hamlet’s dying request to Horatio illustrates:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story. (5.2.357-60)

Accordingly, Horatio offers to tell Hamlet’s story to Fortinbras:

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall’n on the inventors’ heads: all this can I
Truly deliver. (5.2.390-97)

Horatio’s version of the story, though not inaccurate, is a markedly different packaging of the events of the previous five acts than the one that the audience has just witnessed. A perfectly accurate account of the play, it is simultaneously utterly inadequate as a characterization of Hamlet’s experience of it. Hamlet, one of the most, if not the most, intellectual avengers to appear on the early modern stage, is reduced to a stock figure in a clichéd story. In death, as in life, Hamlet is constituted by another’s words. Furthermore, the context of Horatio’s account, an account to the new ruler of Denmark, characterizes
his retelling of Hamlet’s story as the very sort of bureaucratic reporting against which
Hamlet struggles throughout the play.

It is in these figures – Bel-Imperia, Quarlous, and Hamlet – that the contradiction
in Goldberg’s formulation of the connection between writing and subjectivity becomes
clear. Out of the bureaucratic office (the descendant of Goldberg’s secretary’s closet),
there emerges not one subjectivity but two. On the one hand, there is the writing subject,
the bureaucratic employee whose words, and, consequently, whose self, are not his own,
but are rather an extension of the state in whose employ he works. And, on the other
hand, there is the written subject, the subject of the bureaucratic state whose self is made
abject by way of its passing through the apparatus of the state bureaucracy, whose life is
turned to text as a method of social control. Ironically then, it seems that, for both types
of subject that emerge in the early modern bureaucratic state, writing is not the site of
emancipatory individuality, but of limitation and oppression

* * *

Coda:
State of Emergency

The forms of administration alluded to in the preceding chapters were, in the late-
sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, still in the process of emerging. As Penry
Williams argues, “Important as the Privy Council, the Secretaryship, and the lawcourts
may be, they were stunted and fragile by comparison with the machinery of a modern
state” (463). However, the aspect of early modern administration that most obviously
distinguishes it from modern bureaucracies is also the key to its distinctive significance.
While the bureaucratic regimes of the nineteenth century moved political power out of
the hands of monarchs, the early modern English state had not yet differentiated itself in
this way. Rather than a rigorously codified, impersonal structure of authority, rule under the Tudors and early Stuarts was a “combination of the formal and the informal, the official and the personal” (Williams 463). Instead of limiting power, the growing administrative structures which would come to replace the monarchs served instead to extend their reach throughout the realm. That is, there is an inverse proportionality between the growth of the bureaucracy and the personal power of the monarch. The works discussed in this dissertation demonstrate a fear that the early modern state had reached a crisis point in this regard – a structure of governance widespread enough and powerful enough to effectively dominate the territory yet sufficiently weak that it continued to remain ultimately in the control of the monarch. Sejanus’s deployment of the figure of the sodomite king, whose moral dissipation spreads throughout the realm, infecting the youth of “Noble Houses” (4.393), stands as a warning against the combination of personal appetite and political power. Sejanus’s cautionary tale finds its opposite counterpart in Much Ado About Nothing’s vision of a society whose proper functioning is dependent on a willing subordination to an impersonal, exterior authority. The Spanish Tragedy presents the pathetic tale of an administrator whose political power is insufficient in the face of royal corruption, while Hamlet finds royal corruption spreading through and throughout the administrative state. These works, then, present a crisis of representation engendered by the intersection of a burgeoning bureaucracy and a still-potent monarch. To return to the language of Weber, the early signs of a transition from one type of political domination to another, from the “traditional” to the “legal” (Weber 77), produce a confusion of authority; when agents of the state act, who or what
legitimizes their actions? To what end? As Barnardo asks in the opening line of *Hamlet*, “Who’s there?”

This crisis in representation and the renegotiation of authority that accompanies it were precisely the sorts of effects produced by the early modern theatre. In “Mimesis in *Hamlet*,” Robert Weimann asks, “Is there perhaps any basis in the Shakespearean text itself on which to redefine ‘mimesis’ without necessarily opting for either the privileges or the repression of representation, and on which the issue of authority in representation need not necessarily preclude its deconstruction through representation?” (278). For Weimann, the representational practices of the theatre provide a conceptual space in which traditional power structures can be loosed from their traditional moorings. He writes, “For Shakespeare the issue of authority in representation is surprisingly unpredetermined. What his plays reveal (at least up to and including *King Lear*) is an increasing readiness critically to explore the sources of authority, its precariously personal or socially divided manifestations” (Weimann 1990, 277). “Precariously personal” and “socially divided” – both seem apt terms for the sorts of power negotiations represented not only in the plays by Shakespeare discussed in the preceding chapters, but also in the plays of Jonson and Kyd and in the treatises of Angel Day, Robert Cecil, and Wawrzyniec Goslicki. Their investigations of the nature and effects of authority on the early modern stage and beyond constitute more than a passing interest. They demonstrate the extent to which the social logic of bureaucracy and the structures of subjectivity which it implies saturated the consciousness of English playwrights.

In adapting these issues for performance on the public stage, these playwrights bring about a significant shift in the implications of this crisis of representation. Prior to
the appearance of the plays discussed herein, the bureaucratic renegotiation of authority and identity discussed throughout this dissertation had for centuries been a topic of inquiry for servants of the crown, like Hoccleve, or for secretaries like Day or Spenser. By making bureaucracy and its workings the object of mimesis in the public theatre, these playwrights make it available for public consumption. Furthermore, in its incarnation on the stage, the bureaucratic crisis of representation becomes embedded in a representational mode which produces crises of status and identity as a rule. I argued in the Introduction of this dissertation that the questions raised by the growing administrative state about royal authority, about gender, and about fellowship find their analogue in questions raised about the same issues by the representational practices of the early modern theatre. I would argue that the grafting of these questions, which were not new to writers on administration, onto the theatre’s own investigation of identity and authority, reveal the extent to which the two investigations were not analogues, but were instead both manifestations of the same systemic principle.

Finally, the representation of bureaucracy in early modern drama drastically changes the effective reach of these renegotiations of authority and identity. Goldberg argues that the secretarial closet “represents the locus through which a modern individuality emerges, with extensions to all who write” (Goldberg 1990, 9). Just as the growth of the administrative state extrapolates this relationship ad infinitum, the embodiment of bureaucratic structures of authority and meaning into the representational space of the public theatre extends Goldberg’s formulation to a much wider segment of the population. Instead of being limited to those “who write,” the questions of identity raised by these works become available as material to be consumed, reflected upon, and
even experienced vicariously to anyone with a penny and an inclination to attend the theatre.
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